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## ESTHER VANHOMRIGH.

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### CHAPTER VII.

ESSIE was very silent on the journey, as her light chaise—the horse was young and her coachman knew she loved fast going—flew across the Phoenix Park, and swung down the steep hill where the old road to Lucan dips to the banks of the river. It was dark except for the light of the chaise-lamps. Francis was leaning back in the opposite corner. Having addressed her once or twice and received no answer, at length, when they were far upon their road, he roused her by some remarks in the course of which he compared her unfavourably as a companion with a red Indian in a frost. Essie asked pardon humbly for her inattention. She might have alleged a headache, but small fibs did not come naturally to her, and in truth she was physically quite unaffected by her part in an interview that had shattered Mrs. Johnson. So she merely said that something had occurred in Dublin which pre-occupied her mind. Perhaps the darkness gave Francis courage.

"Essie," he said shortly; "Moll had confidence in me. 'Tis a pity you have none."

"Now, Frank, how can you say that, when I show so much?"

"Yes, a very great deal. You tell me your money matters because you don't value 'em any more, and believe that I can save you trouble. That's your shrewdness, and shows no confidence except in mine."

"Well, I see you are still the old brat, never contented."

"Pardon me, I was never discontented without a cause. Do I complain of living in the American wilderness, as you folks at



home call it? No, I like it, and so would you if you was there. 'Tis reasonable to complain when a man has a grievance that can be remedied, as mine can easily be. Sure I don't flatter myself in thinking there's no other relation you have, male or female, you value as much as myself. How vastly well that sounds for me, to one that does not know!"

Essie could not help smiling.

"I am willing to allow as much," she replied.

"'Tis not a great deal," returned Francis drily, "when you can't abide the others. But Moll thought more of me than that, Hess; she asked me to stand to you in her place when she was gone."

"Nay, that's impossible, Frank!" cried Essie.

"You think I don't love you as much," he said.

"How should you, dear cousin?" she answered gently. "Yet you love me much better than I deserve."

"They were silent a few minutes. Then—

"Essie," he said, "do you know that Moll sent for me to come home and take care of you."

"No," she cried, with a start; "indeed I did not. I am very sorry for 't—I mean sorry you should have left your affairs and taken so long a journey on my account, when you can be of little service to me, except in so far as I am honestly glad and comforted to have you."

"I might perhaps be of service to you," he returned. "But you will not let me. You will not consider that we have known each other as well as brother and sister all the days of our lives, and that there's none who has so good reason to love and serve you as I. 'T was not on account of your land or your fortune—matters with which she knew you well able to deal—that Molly begged me to stay with you."

"I know not what you would have," she murmured.

"I would not be forced to watch you sending good years after bad ones, and never a word said. For Heaven's sake let there be no disguises between us, but tell me plainly whether you intend staying here and continuing the same mode of life. You know what I mean. But 'tis madness, and I'll not leave you to it—I'll hang first. Oh, I have a thousand things to say to you, Hess, and can't say 'em and yet I will."

"Not now, Francis," she cried faintly, "wait a little. I know not what I intend. I promise you shall hear my resolve, and even the reasons for 't when 'tis made. But say no more on 't now. I can bear nothing more this evening."



"I am content with your word of honour that you'll put confidence in me. Indeed, there's none has so great a regard for you, Essie, if you'd but believe it."

And so they passed to indifferent topics.

Essie went to rest that night with a conscience, if not a heart, unburdened. She could not but believe Mrs. Johnson's solemn assertion that she was not married to Swift, but she did not feel very sure that she had got to the bottom of the matter. And now that the impulse which had taken her into Mrs. Johnson's presence was exhausted, she began to fear that Swift would be told of her proceedings, and be extremely angry with her. She lay awake half the night, thinking of what she could say to assuage his wrath. She decided to write to Mrs. Johnson and beg her to keep silence ; but when the morning came she could not stoop to that. It was a warm, grey day, with a noise of distant thunder rolling about the Wexford mountains, and an occasional swift, heavy shower racing across the garden. She wandered out between these brief storms, pretending to garden, and then about the house, pretending to look to household trifles, but all the time a heavy weight seemed to be on her head, and a yet heavier one, a weight of terror, on her heart. About noon, Francis came in to transact business, and they laid out ledgers and papers on the book-room table ; but he complained that she was so inattentive she might as well not have been there. Before they had been long at work, she suddenly jumped up, and thrusting some papers into his hands, said to him with a startled face :—

"Take these into the next room. Pray go at once."

She had heard the sound of hasty hoofs approaching the house along the hard high-road. A moment after there came a loud knock at the front gate. Francis went reluctantly, and left the door of the dining-parlour ajar. He could not but guess whose was the heavy foot that immediately afterwards came striding into the house. Swift had flung his reins to the old manservant who opened the outer gate to him, and entering the house unannounced, burst into the book-room.

Essie faced him half leaning on the table, as white as a sheet and with terror legible on every line of her face. Two days ago she had wondered in jest what the hundredth Cadenus, the one she had not seen, was like ; now she saw him. The awful look she had seen and dreaded before was mild compared to this, for it was not only a vision of black wrath that stood there frowning



upon her, but something worse ; something that cut into her heart, cold and sharp as a knife. It was, or seemed to be, Hate. An interminable minute the shape stood in the doorway, then making two strides forward, flung a sealed packet violently down on to the table. At the same instant Esther sunk on her knees, as much because her trembling limbs refused to support her as for the purpose of supplication, and stretching out her hand, clutched him convulsively by the right arm as he turned to go.

"Cadenus!" she would have shrieked ; but nothing more was audible than a hoarse murmur that died in her throat.

"Cadenus!"

At the second attempt her lips framed the word ; but the voice was a mere whisper.

He raised his left hand as though to loose her fingers from his sleeve, and loosening them herself, she let her arm drop to her side. In an instant he was gone. She heard the bang of the house-door and the outer gate, and then the hurrying hoofs of the big horse, just as she had heard them four minutes ago, only this time they were going instead of coming. When the last echo of the horse-hoofs had died away, Francis, listening in equal bewilderment both to the sounds and the silence of those few minutes, heard a strange cry ; a long, low, moaning cry, less human than like that of some inarticulate suffering creature. Yet it seemed to proceed from the book-room. He went in, and coming hastily round the corner of the open door, almost trod on Essie's hand. She had fallen face forwards on the ground, and the hand stretched out above her head held a torn wrapper, which seemed to have contained the sheaf of papers, that had slipped after her from the table, and lay strewn upon her body. Francis called her name, but there was no response, and on raising her head he saw she was perfectly unconscious.

Swift had once been used to scoff good-naturedly at Esther if she told him that she was sick ; but hers was that strange kind of good health which has a poor constitution behind it, and the sufferings and anxieties of the last few years had told upon it. For some days after her last interview, if so it could be called, with Swift, she kept her room and saw no one. When she reappeared both Mrs. Conolly and Francis were startled at the change in her. To herself it appeared not so much that she was another person, as that she was dead ; a corpse that moved and spoke and even remembered, but to which some essential



of life was lacking. It no more occurred to her that she could take up again that past existence of hers than it could have done if the grave lay between her and it. For years she had believed, at first rightly, afterwards mistakenly, that Swift loved her better than he dared allow. Time, circumstance, and last but not least, the violence of her own passion, had completely worn out his sentiment for her. Now for her too the moment of awakening had come. She saw that her love was unreturned ; yet more, she believed that she had always been indifferent to her idol, and had even become an object of hatred to him. Her twelve-years' passion, the torture and the inspiration of her life, fell dead, and with it died the greater part of herself.

For many days and nights following that first and last meeting of the two Esthers, the thoughts of each ran in much the same channel. Esther Johnson, for all her philosophy, was unable to refrain from bestowing a good deal of useless and painful reflection on the disappointments and disadvantages of her connection with Swift, while the disaster and humiliation that had attended hers seemed to Esther Vanhomrigh, as she lay staring at the darkness night after night, to be branded on her flesh. Yet each one, entertaining the last of the common stock of lovers' delusions, said to herself that after all Swift was the only man she could ever have loved.

If in the night Essie tossed on her bed, or paced the room in a restless agony of thought, in the daytime a great apathy of body and mind had fallen upon her. Her constitutional indolence, no longer counteracted by strong interests, seemed all that was left of the old Esther. The autumn was cold and rainy, and she spent most of the day on the stool before the fire that had been her favourite seat, but the habitual book was no longer open before her, or if open, was unread. She never left the grounds, even to visit the few poor families whom she had found fit objects for her charity among an innumerable crowd of claimants. For, generally speaking, the dirt and untruthfulness and disorderliness of the Irish poor offended her more than their wit and shrewdness and *naïveté* amused her. Sometimes she would leave the fire and go out through the parlour window without any protection against damp and cold, as had always been her custom, and stroll aimlessly round the garden, or stand on the old bridge and watch the swollen Liffey tearing under the high arches, tumbling amid its yellow foam dead leaves and mats of dry reeds and broken branches. She would



go to the bower, too, and stand with a strange apathy in the very place, leaning on the very branch, where she had stood on that September day when she and Swift had last visited it together. The bower above and around and the island below, turned golden, and sheltering each other, kept their glory later than the meadow trees, which the stormy winds and rains stripped bare earlier than usual. But in time, they too laid it by, and the slender yellow leaves of the willows, and the small fretted orange or red leaves of the thorns, were mingled in the stream and rushed on under the bridge, or were heaped by the eddying river in its miniature bays and inlets. The russet foliage of the oak remained longer to roof in the bower ; but the wind and rain moaned and pattered through it onto the rock below. Still if it did not actually rain, Essie continued to come thither in her black dress and thin kerchief, though week by week the full curves of her shape fell away and grew nearer to hollow leanness, and the pink of her cheeks was replaced by two spots of hard, bright colour.

Meantime Francis, lost now to all thought of what might be said about it, hovered round her, putting shawls for her that she did not use and food on her plate that she would not eat, and inviting her to walks and rides she would not take, though she never failed to thank him for his care and remonstrate with him for losing his time with her. But something more was needed than this kind of care. If anything could have warmed the icy corpse of Esther back to life, it would have been a warm stream of human tenderness, flowing out perpetually towards her in expressions of love, in soft beguiling ways and instinctive adaptation to her moods. Her melancholy condition and loneliness, except for himself, made Francis more sensible than ever of his deep attachment to her, and he knew vaguely what she wanted, but he could not give it her. All his life up till now he had been accustomed, first as a matter of temperament, then as a matter of pride, to hide all that was warm and kind in him under a cold and unkind mask, and now in bitter helplessness he strove to alter himself and could not. A caressing word upon his lips sounded idiotic in his own ears and unnatural in hers. If love had burst into his life as something new, it might have altered all that ; but his love for Esther was part of his old self, and to her less than to anyone else, could he be different.

To be passive and helpless in the face of a crisis was a new experience to him. But he dared not take any decided step,



lest it should be a wrong one, and had Essie been capable of noticing anything, she must have noticed a transformation in him, for he grew silent and almost humble. He never asked her about that strange apparition of Swift, for he had observed enough to be satisfied that it had signified a rupture between them. The papers which he had picked up from the floor and locked into her desk on the day when he had found her lying unconscious, were evidently letters of her own, and the thick fair curl that had fallen down among them had no doubt been cut years ago from her young head, with a *badinage* that had not wholly masked some underlying sentiment. The Dean had quitted the field; so far so good—but what a wreck had he left behind him!

After this state of things had lasted without any change for nearly four months, Francis at length behaved in a manner that he despised; he went and confided his wishes and difficulties, and Esther's melancholy condition to Mrs. Conolly. Mrs. Conolly had long had uneasy suspicions concerning Miss Vanhomrigh and the Dean, whom she was as willing as Francis could desire to credit with the whole blame of the matter. This was the secret of her anxiety to see Miss Vanhomrigh well married, for otherwise she was not one of that class of matrons who regard all the disengaged men and women of their acquaintance as so much marrying material. When Francis had told her his story in an embarrassed and unexpansive manner, yet with a sincerity of pain and anxiety which he could not disguise, and when she had amplified it by her own guesses and observations, she solemnly declared that her fancy could not have devised anything so good as this marriage, which, besides presenting Miss Vanhomrigh with a good husband, would remove her far from the possibility of renewed intercourse with Swift, and from all that could recall to her the faults and the misfortunes of her youth.

"Describe to her your solitude, Mr. Mordaunt," she said when Francis had declared for the tenth time that Essie had a regard for him, but that he despaired of persuading her to look upon him as a possible husband. "Describe to her the horrors and dangers of the American wilderness!"

"Danger! Nonsense!" interjected Francis.

"The absence of all that can make life agreeable," continued Mrs. Conolly; "and see if she'll not be eager to share all with you."

"What, madam? You would have me appeal to her pity?"



"Yes, Mr. Mordaunt, for her sake. I am certain she'd make you a good wife, for she's one of whom you may say that when she sets her hand to the plough she looks not back. Yet 'tis more for her sake than for the difference 't will make to you in that savage—yes, I will call it savage—country, that I earnestly hope for this marriage. If you love her, lay pride on one side, and through her love if you can, but through her pity if you cannot, win her—for her own sake win her."

Francis put up his lip, and could not promise to do anything of the sort.

She went to see Miss Vanhomrigh with him a few days after, and found her on the terrace outside the summer parlour.

"What will you do when your cousin is gone?" she asked Essie, when Francis had stepped down into the garden for a minute. "Sure you'll not let him cross the seas alone and leave you here alone too. 'Twould be the foolishhest thing."

"Would it not be foolisher, dear madam, to keep him here idle, and even in danger should he be recognised?"

"'T would be madness. But there's no such reason why you should not accompany him."

"Why, Madam Conolly, you forget we are not in fact very nearly related. The good people in the plantations would talk."

"I meant of course that you should marry him."

"Poor Francis! Would not that be a little unfair to him?"

"My dear, he wishes it," whispered Mrs. Conolly, pressing her hand as Francis rejoined them. And in a few minutes she took her leave.

"What were you saying to my cousin just now, madam?" asked Francis, as he handed her down the terrace steps.

"I was saying that you wished to marry her," replied Mrs. Conolly indifferently. Francis ejaculated something that did not seem expressive of gratitude.

"Lord! No thanks, I beg," said Mrs. Conolly, with a little smile. "Sure, 't was not for your sake I did it, but for hers. I was convinced you'd never do it yourself."

"You take me for a timid man, Madam Conolly."

"By no means, but for a lover so half-hearted and cold that, were 't not for the happy circumstance of your dwelling in America, I'd by no means desire a woman I valued to marry you."

She spoke partly in jest, but also partly in earnest. Francis reddened, but when he returned to Esther he was unusually pale. It was a mild December day, and she sat listlessly on the



balustrade of the terrace, looking away over the river and the meadows to the blue Dublin mountains. Francis stood in front of her.

"Did you believe what Madam Conolly told you, Hess?" he asked.

She turned her eyes on him with a puzzled look.

"What was it?" she said. Mrs. Conolly's whispered information had made no impression upon her, and she was not thinking about it. Indeed she could hardly be said to think of anything in those long days of brooding, and even at night her thoughts and feelings had ceased to be very clear and poignant, though fever and a hacking cough kept her awake.

"She told you I wished to marry you, and it is true. If she said that I loved you dearly, that was true also."

She still looked at him with that little puzzled contraction of the brows that was familiar to him.

"Mrs. Conolly cannot let me be," she said; "but indeed you need not listen to her, Francis. You have always made too much of the trifle of kindness you owe us. I do not wish to marry, and if I did, for you to marry me out of gratitude—why, 't would be ridiculous."

"Good heavens, Hess!" he cried, coming nearer to her, "can't you believe that I love you?"

She sighed wearily, as one who is obliged to talk of what does not interest her.

"I know you do in reason, Frank," she answered. "But you don't want to marry me. Mrs. Conolly has been talking to you. Why can't she leave me alone?"

"Now listen to me, Essie," he said, standing up close to her and taking her hand. "Confound Mrs. Conolly; don't mention her again. Ten years ago I said to myself that I would get you for my wife, if ever I had a chance. Have I got a chance now, Hess? Do try and believe I love you."

"No, no; you can't," she whispered, turning pale.

"Hess, I can—I do."

She wrenched her hand from his grasp, for a moment roused from her apathy.

"You wouldn't if you knew," she moaned. "Not if you knew how I have spent myself in worshipping that man—oh, much worse!—how I grovelled at his feet, and he all the time hating me."

Francis stepped back and silenced her by a quick gesture.



"Hush," he said almost sternly, "never tell me a word of him! 'Tis folly, for you can say somewhat to give me pain, but nothing to alter my regard for you. For God's sake let all this be clean forgotten between us. There's a new country waiting for you, Essie. You'll love it very well. There's little company there, but you never was fond of company, and there's plenty of work to be done, such as you was used to love. And I must tell you myself, since there's no one else to do it, that you will find yourself and me persons of consequence out there, and all the people coming to us for counsel and assistance from as many square miles of country as there are in Ulster and Leinster put together. You used to say you'd love to be somebody, Hess, and on my honour you may be a queen out there. Then 'tis such a wholesome air—not like this chill place; you'll soon lose your cough and be as strong as ever you was. 'Tis certain you'd do well to come with me, Hess—I can't take a 'No.'"

Her momentary agitation had passed away; she listened quietly with bowed head. She remained silent so for a minute or two after he had finished speaking, and he fancied his words had not been without effect. Then she looked up at him with a strange look, half dull, half sad, and shook her head slowly.

"'Tis too late," she said. "You are very good, Frank; once I should have liked your new country well enough." He cried out against her "too late," but she continued talking in a spiritless way, yet as one stating some plain fact. "Yes, it is too late, and I will tell you why. I dare be sworn you think there's no such thing as a broken heart; I was used myself to think it a bit of cant or ladies' vapours. I know better now, for my own heart is broken. It should not be so, I allow; I must be a poor weak creature for this to have happened. I see very well that what you say is wise as well as kind, and I should be very fortunate if I could do as you advise; but, my dear, 'tis of no manner of use. I am fit for nothing more in this world though I should be thirty or forty years in it, as I very well may be."

There was something dreadful in the dead calm of her speech and look; it almost carried conviction to Francis's unwilling mind, but he withstood the impression. Sitting down by her on the balustrade, he endeavoured to argue with her, but in vain. She only shook her head at his reasoning. At length he was reduced to silence and despair, when suddenly Mrs. Conolly's



advice occurred to him. Must he appeal to her pity? Yes; for her own sake. So he made the last sacrifice of his pride, and pleaded with her to come for his sake, because if she did not his life would always be solitary—more solitary than she could imagine.

She smiled faintly.

"Not always, Frank. You are young for a man, and look at me—I am an old, old woman. Some day you will get a young wife, and live happy ever after."

He answered impatiently—

"Women seldom come my way, and when they do they don't love me nor I them. Besides you know me, and with how cold a heart I am cursed, so that I never loved but very few persons in my life. There are just two alive now I love, and one is his lordship, and t'other—well, that other I love incomparably more, and always shall do, so long as I live."

"I am sorry for you, Frank," she said, "and yet I am not. For I can't, however I try, be truly sorry about anything. I used to laugh at you when you was a boy, for thinking whenever you was sick that you was going to die, and now I am as foolish myself, for it seems to me that I am going to die."

He threw his arm round her, not caressingly, but to drag her into the house.

"Good Heaven," he cried; "you must leave this cursed climate, or 't will kill you as it killed Molly!"

"Ah," she said. "So you too think it killed Molly. I have sometimes thought so since she died. In that case 'twas my fault that she died, for 'twas my doing that we settled in Ireland; she never loved it very well."

They had by this time reached the glass doors into the parlour.

"Essie," he said solemnly, "if you continue to give way to such splenetic fancies, you will end a mad woman."

"I was a mad woman, Frank, for the best part of my life. 'T would have been a mercy then to have sent me to Bedlam. But now I am quite sane, and know very well what I have been and what I am. Oh, Frank, you must be mad yourself if you really love me. Let us not talk of it any more."

But Francis, having once begun his wooing of Esther, carried it on with the energy and persistence that marked him in all his undertakings. In earlier days such obstinacy would have roused a rebellious temper in Esther, but 'Governor Huff' was now dead and buried. She shed a few weary tears over the



matter, and finally got her own way by partial yielding. He was to go away and leave her to think it over. In the spring, on his way back to America, he was to return to Cellbridge, and then perhaps—very likely, she would do as he wished.

So foolish a thing is the human heart that it was with a feeling of relief Esther watched the ship sail out of Dublin Bay, which bore away the only creature that loved her, except two old servants. She was glad to get back home and brood wholly undisturbed, even Mrs. Conolly having gone to Dublin. Soon after Christmas there came a heavy fall of snow and an iron frost that seemed as if it would never go. For weeks the roads were blocked and every village thrown upon its own resources. Neither news nor visitors came near the lonely house at Cellbridge. The black trees broke under the frozen snow, and their great branches lay across the garden paths or hung into the river and caught as in a net the pieces of ice it brought down in its chill dark current. And sometimes Esther wandered out to the bridge, and watched the icy river or scattered food for the freezing birds, but oftener she sat idle by the fire. All the winter there was no change in her, except that every day she grew leaner, and coughed more, and suffered more pain.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

When Swift had recovered the "bad head" that had followed on his angry rupture with Esther Vanhomrigh, he expected to find a letter from her full of appeal and remonstrance, or at least reproach. He had fully made up his mind to return it unread, yet he was glad not to find it. Weeks went by, and still she made no sign. At length then his life was free from those continual claims which he could neither deny nor allow. He had hardly guessed how completely Esther's sympathy and admiration had ceased to compensate him for the worry and division of interest his connection with her caused him. He who prided himself justly on the faithfulness of his attachments, was a little ashamed to think how this great friendship of his, that had once been but too warm, was now quite cold; a dead burden to be thrown out of his life with a sigh of relief. But the fact must be acknowledged, with shame or without it; he was thankful to have shaken himself free from this ten-years' entanglement. He walked the streets with a lighter step, and gave more sugar-plums



and halfpence to the children, and rallied the apple-women more good-naturedly than he had ever been known to do ; and every one said how hearty the Dean was looking. Mrs. Johnson, too, was brilliant in spite of the bad winter. Since she would not let him speak to her on the subject, he had written her a letter asking her pardon a thousand times for the pain he had caused her, telling her that he was fully resolved never again to hold any communication with that poor crazed creature "that shall be nameless," and imploring her to exercise all her powers of forgetfulness on the matter. Hetty did not, never again could love him as she had once done, but she was neither analytical nor repining, and found another kind of happiness in his complete devotion to her ; a devotion as tender as he had shown in the days of her youth, and much more respectful and unselfish. She was formed for society, and life became very pleasant to her as the increasing number of Swift's admirers and friends widened the circle of her own. He was no longer a lonely man in Dublin, except with the inevitable loneliness of his intellect and character. If it was beyond Mrs. Johnson's power to understand or genuinely care for many of his interests, there were others about him now to supply her deficiencies ; young eager minds looking to him for inspiration. He threw off that winter in mere light-heartedness a dozen anonymous ballads, epigrams and broadsheets on trifling occasions, which have mostly disappeared with the trunks of a long-past generation of travellers. They served to keep his pen sharp for more serious warfare, as it was reported that the English Parliament intended before long to make a fresh attack on the liberties of Ireland, through the coinage. All patriotic eyes turned towards the great Dean, and he like the war-horse of his favourite Book of Job, scented the battle from afar and cried "Ha, ha !" at the sound of the trumpet. For full six months he rejoiced in his freedom, and never so much as thought of Esther Vanhomrigh. At length the persistent black east winds had ceased to blow, and as he rode into the country, he noticed that the catkins and primroses were out in the hedges ; then he could not help thinking and thinking kindly, of her who was used to have an unusual delight in the spring. Not that he wished to renew his intercourse with her, which he saw clearly now to have been disadvantageous to her as well as troublesome to himself, but he hoped she was gone over to England, since he had heard nothing of her this winter. There no doubt she was



nursing Mrs. Purvis, and would soon inherit another fortune and marry some one ; perhaps "little Master," her cousin, who was an ugly, disagreeable fellow, but honest enough. These suppositions served as an anodyne to any little uneasiness of conscience that might have been caused by the recollection of his once esteemed and adored Missessy. The sunshine that had long been missing from the earth was very pleasant to feel, and his head seemed boiling with an unusual number of ideas as he trotted along, or smoked a surreptitious pipe in his library window-seat. The world was going so well with him that had he retained enough of his usual pessimism, he would have said something unfortunate must be about to happen.

One Sunday late in May, Patrick was dressing him for the Cathedral, and he was endeavouring to forget his amusement over the complete success of his last literary fraud, and attune his mind to the sacred function in which he was about to take part. Patrick was talking ; he always talked, and the dean listened or not according to his humour. On this day he had not paid any attention to Patrick's discourse, till the name Vanhomrigh attracted his attention.

"Eh? H'm! What was that you was saying, you chatter-pie?"

"Thunder and turf! His riverence gets hard of hearing! I was saying, your honour," and here Patrick raised his voice to a shout, "Mrs. Smith's own woman met Miss Vanhomrigh's man in the town to-day, and he tould her his poor lady was mighty sick—bless her purty face!—and he afther fetching the doctor."

"Why, I thought she was gone to England."

"Sure she never went, your riverence. She's been in a mighty queer way all this year, it seems ; near crazy they do say ; and now, poor lady, she's in the article of death. 'T was her own man told me so. Lord, lord! And her such an illigant crayture, and such a fine spirited way wid her too!"

"Pooh, Patrick! You servants love to exaggerate. No doubt when I have a bad head you tell all the footmen of your acquaintance the poor Dean's in the article of death. Put my bands straight. Pshaw ; I say Miss Vanhomrigh 'll live to a hundred ! My hat, I say ; the bell will be down and you still jabbering. I know not whose curse we bear—'t is certainly not the curse of Adam—when we must needs feed this pack of lying varlets."

And still muttering he went out.



But he could not banish from his mind this bit of news, probably false, since all Patrick's news was false, which he had heard. It pursued him through the cathedral service, and he kept wondering how far it was true while mechanically repeating the usual prayers. He found himself taking it more and more seriously, and, giving way to a strange kind of horror, a something like remorse, although he knew of no just grounds for such a feeling. While he stood up in his stall in the choir listening to the anthem, which always bored him and to-day was unusually long, this feeling increased upon him, and he was conscious of a throbbing in the head and a general tension of the nerves, such as was often symptomatic of one of his attacks. The organ was playing very low, and one boy was singing with a pure but somewhat veiled soprano voice, inexpressive as a bird's and sounding thinly in the large crowded church. Suddenly, high and wild above the low booming of the organ and the thin trickle of song, there rung out a shriek; a woman's shriek of agony, at once hoarse and shrill. The sound gave him a terrible shock; he leaned far out from his stall and looked down the aisle to the west end, whence the shriek appeared to have come, and there he saw a woman in a white dress wringing her hands and weeping wildly. He distinctly saw Esther Vanhomrigh. Forgetful of the anthem, the dignity of his office and the many eyes upon him, he left his place and stalked down the whole length of the cathedral. Many of the people had left their seats, and a little crowd was collected at the west end.

"Where is she?" asked the Dean sternly, scarcely lowering his voice. A verger, more decorous than his superior, pointed to a poor woman of the shop-keeping class, stout and elderly, who lay on the ground in convulsions, while a doctor, kneeling at her side, cut open her sleeve preparatory to bleeding her.

"Who shrieked and caused this tumult?"

"'Twas her, your reverence. Faith, the poor lady is in a strong fit and couldn't hinder herself, Mr. Dean."

"Ay, but the lady in white?"

No one had seen a lady in white, unless a child sitting on a bench outside the pews, who had jumped up to see what was the matter, could be considered a lady. The doors were closed, and, looking carefully round the church he satisfied himself that there was no one present resembling Miss Vanhomrigh. The blood that horror had frozen in his veins flowed on with a leap; he



blushed a dark red as he walked up the aisle more hastily than he had come down it, and regained his stall as the anthem was ended. What a trick had his short sight and his fancy combined to play him! It was ludicrous. He was in that excited condition when a very poor joke or no joke at all will sometimes strike a person as irresistibly funny. His demeanour during the service was as a rule punctiliously reverent, but when, immediately on reaching his seat, he kneeled down to join in the prayer for the King's Majesty, he could no longer restrain his amusement. He seldom felt any inclination to laugh aloud, but just on this occasion he could have made the choir ring with his mirth. Fortunately he was able to moderate it to some extent, though not to stop it. As he kneeled with his face plunged in the voluminous folds of his sleeves, the curls of his peruke continued to tremble and his broad shoulders to shake and heave in a prolonged paroxysm of laughter which shocked himself; on account not of its cause, but of its impropriety in the sacred building. The canon sitting next to him, who was accustomed to hear him following the prayers in a whisper and joining loudly in the *Amens*, could not but observe his unusual demeanour. Knowing him to be a kind-hearted man, and supposing him to have gone to the other end of the cathedral with a view to assisting the sick person there, he took the Dean's emotion to be of an opposite nature to that which it really was. As the canon happened to be the only one of the chapter who understood that he had a great man for his dean, he took note of the little incident, and added it to his private collection of anecdotes, illustrating the compassionate nature of the most remorseless of satirists. It is fair to say that the rest were more genuine.

By the time the prayers were over he had recovered both from his untimely merriment and the disquieting effect of Patrick's bit of news. He would send a note to a cousin of Miss Vanhomrigh's in Dublin and ask after her, but in all probability it was some very slight complaint from which she was suffering. So he smiled with particular cheerfulness at P. P. T., waiting for him as usual at the south door, just on the spot which he afterwards chose for her grave, and they walked over to the Deanery together; Dingley too must accompany them. He did not always postpone dinner till after the afternoon prayers, but to-day there were some gentlemen from a distance expected, and the dinner had been put late to suit their convenience. Before it was over he received a line from Miss Vanhomrigh's cousin,



stating she had been a little indisposed, but that nothing had been heard of her for some weeks, and "no news is good news." Mrs. Johnson was rather tired and went home early, but the gentlemen lingered on in the dining-room till late in the evening, not indeed drinking heavily, which the Dean did not permit, but enjoying a regale of coffee and conversation.

Dr. Sheridan was there, and he and Swift exchanged volleys of punning wit, such as now delights none but the writer of burlesques, but from which intelligent persons in those days contrived to extract amusement. The talk, however, was far from being all of such a nature, for Mr. Ford had just received a letter from Erasmus Lewis giving a detailed account of how the man Wood had bought from the K——'s mistress—the very sum paid was mentioned—the privilege of issuing a new copper coinage for Ireland; how it was to be much more debased than the English, even if this Wood fulfilled his contract honestly, and whereas in England the copper coinage was scarce more than a hundredth part of the currency, in Ireland it was proposed to make it as much as a quarter. Something of all this the audience knew, but their wrath rose as the details, some old and some fresh and some false or exaggerated, were marshalled before them. Dr. Winter, who was a mathematician, whipped out a piece of paper and speedily proved it would cost the country fifty thousand pounds.

"Why, sir," said a gentleman from Wexford, with an oath, "all the gold and silver in the country will immediately find its way into the pockets of landlords in England, and we that live on our own estates must be content with dirty stuff, which none that are not obliged will say 'thank you' for, and which will be worth nothing in exchange with the money of other countries."

"'T will be the ruin of our commerce," cried another. "But that no doubt was Walpole's chief design in the matter."

"'T was Sunderland sold the privilege to Kendal," interposed Delany.

"May be; but doubtless Walpole moved the fat Vrow to demand it," said Swift. "Ay, ay, wherever there's wickedness and corruption, you may take your oath Flimnap—— Walpole I mean 's in it."

"Let's drink to his damnation. Pass the bottle!" cried Mr. Ford, and filled his glass.

"And to Wood's and the German hag's," added his neighbour,



surveying the diminished contents of the bottle somewhat anxiously.

"If we must drink damnation to every one that's tarred with that brush, my cellar will not last it out, nor will there be lying room under my table for the fallen," said Swift drily. "But 'tis not persons, 'tis the system that's most damnable. The king's mistress has as good a right as the king's ministers to sell that which belongs to neither of 'em. How long are we to be treated like slaves? As long, I suppose, as we consent to it. What does it matter to us if this ironmonger coins his soul and body into halfpence for us, if we don't take 'em?"

"Well said!" cried several; "Mr. Dean, we'll beat Walpole yet."

"I fear 't will be a difficult undertaking," observed Delany, who was patriotic, but somewhat wanting in courage and enthusiasm.

"Difficult!" ejaculated the Dean. "Ay, there are plenty of men fancy an enterprise condemned as impossible when they have pronounced it to be difficult. If 't were easy you'd not find me troubling to undertake it."

"How do you purpose to begin?" asked Winter.

The Dean shook his head and smiled.

"The oracle is dumb, Winter."

"I wish," said another, "there was some chance of Walpole coming soon to the gallows, and then I doubt we should find he had left as edifying a last speech and confession as the late lamented Elliston."

This was a notorious street-robber, executed about a year before, whose purported last dying speech and confession, wherein he declared himself to have denounced all his old associates so that they might be proceeded against if they did not abandon their evil practices, had been circulated in Dublin, and had produced consternation among the criminal classes. But the better informed suspected the genuineness of the Dying Speech and Confession, and even thought they could guess its real author.

"Then should we be as free from tyranny and corruption in Dublin, as we are now from street-robbery," said Delany with a smile.

"'Twas an excellent thought, whoever it belonged to, to print the rogue's confession," returned Swift gravely. "I'm told there's scarce been the least theft on the streets this twelvemonth."

"'Tis an odd thing, though, the fellow held so good a pen,"



said Winter slyly; "I cannot help suspecting that if Walpole should attempt the same, their styles would be found to resemble each other surprisingly."

"Your riverence," interposed Patrick, in an agitated whisper, "there's a gentleman without that's ather seeing you on a matther of life and death, and there's no denying him at all, at all. Indeed, sir, he'll take no denial."

Swift had changed his seat after dinner, in order to hob-nob more freely with Sheridan, and the door, which Patrick held wide open, was immediately behind him. The untimely visitor in his impatience had followed Patrick and stood but a little way back from the threshold of the room. The light from a sconce near fell on his face. Swift had not turned his head, but lifting his eyes as Patrick spoke, he met the stranger's eyes looking out at him from a mirror on the opposite wall. These eyes meeting his so unexpectedly, the apparition of that white stern face arising like a ghost opposite him in the midst of his festivity, startled and disturbed him as much as though it had been the ancient writing on the wall. He turned and made sure it really was Miss Vanhomrigh's cousin Francis; then he flung away his dinner-napkin and stepped out into the hall, closing the door sharply behind him.

"Is Miss Vanhomrigh sick?" he asked of his visitor, without ceremony.

"Dying," replied Francis shortly. His eyes were worn and red with watching and secret tears, and his whole face looked older by several years than it had done in the autumn.

"Impossible!" cried Swift, turning pale. "Good Heaven, sir, there must be some hope!"

"None at all. 'Tis a question of a few hours," returned Francis. "She is urgent to see you. I think she is wandering, but I could not forbear promising to bring you."

Swift was deeply affected.

"This is terrible," he said. "Poor, poor Missessy! Poor dear child! 'Tis so sudden I cannot feel it true."

"There is not a moment to lose," said Francis. "If you mean to come, order your best horse out at once. Mine is having a mash, and will go back as fast as he came."

The Dean hastily gave the order. He would not return to the dining-room lest his agitation should be visible, but rushed upstairs to change his gown for a riding-dress, while Francis went out to fetch his horse from the stables of a neighbouring



inn. In an incredibly short space of time they were crossing the bridge at a sharp trot, side by side. The Dean would have liked to inquire further concerning Essie's condition, but he had an unaccountable feeling of embarrassment in addressing Francis. Besides, the noise of the streets, which on this fine moonlight evening were full of traffic, seemed an unfitting accompaniment to conversation so solemn and distressing as theirs must needs be. So he wrapped himself in reflections that every moment became more poignant. They took the way by Phoenix Park, and Francis being a little ahead when they arrived, had no sooner touched the turf than he let his horse break into a gallop. The Dean's big horse, which though naturally not so fast was fresher, started eagerly in pursuit, and the two dark shapes flew on neck and neck across the pale open stretches of the park, till the ground dipped and they were blotted out in the dark shadows of some thorn-trees. When they regained the road they breathed their horses, and the Dean almost timidly addressed his companion.

"Is not this sickness, sir, very sudden?"

"No, sir," replied Francis. "This violent fever is sudden, but she has been sick ever since the autumn, and has taken no manner of care of her health till very lately. I endeavoured to make her more careful of herself while I was with her, but to no purpose."

"Ah, poor child!" cried the Dean, no longer able to restrain his tears. "She was used to have such good health; no doubt she could not believe she was ill."

"No, sir, that was not it!" returned Francis. "But she was indifferent whether she was ill or well, or lived or died. Why do you weep, Mr. Dean? Was not you just as indifferent? I never heard that you made the least inquiry after her."

"Mr. Mordaunt," replied Swift, with a kind of dignified humility, "you have the right to reproach me, for you have been a true friend to poor Missessy, and I have not. I have been tender when I should have been severe, and hard when indulgence would have better become me. But indeed, Mr. Mordaunt, it has been more for her sake and another's than my own, that I have refrained from a reconciliation with her. You know, perhaps, we quarrelled."

"I know you broke her heart," cried Francis, "if you call that quarrelling. You have killed her, Dr. Swift, as certainly as though you had put a bullet in it."



As he had ridden silent at his companion's side, his former relations to Esther had presented themselves to Swift in a new light. This was partly owing to the shock of this summons to her death-bed, and partly because he had considered the subject so little during the last eight months that the mist of old habit and sentiment, which had once obscured it to the eyes of his judgment, had had time to clear away. He condemned himself, but this last condemnation was more than his reason or his feelings could accept.

"Sir," he said, "you are a young man, and grief and resentment lead you too far. I fear 'tis true that Miss Vanhomrigh was more affected by the unhappy difference between us than I at all guessed ; but a broken heart was never yet found out of a play or a romance. Believe me, poor Essie will live if she has no other disease than that."

"She has," replied Francis, "and yet I confidently believe that were it not for you, we that love her should now see her as well and strong as ever she was in England. I cannot, sir, affect a desire to spare you grief and pain. You spared her none. I tell you that when I left her at Christmas she was utterly reckless of her health, and seemed to desire death if she could be said to desire anything. She drove me most unwillingly from her side, and I went, hoping that my absence would cause her in some degree to miss me, and that on my return she would consent to come with me as my wife to a country where the air was wholesome for her complaint, and where she might forget her misfortunes. She wrote to me scarcely ever, but her old serving-woman, that was nurse to both of us, wrote me at last as well as she could, poor creature, that can scarce write at all. She told me Essie had altered since the winter was over, and was no longer so dull, but sometimes in a kind of fever which, the old creature thought, made her almost wandering in her mind, though she would never to bed for it. And just as I was starting to go, Essie herself wrote me to come, and how she was ill, but would be married as soon as I pleased and go to America, and hoped so to get her health again. And I was fool enough to think all going very well."

He was silent.

"How long since was it that you returned?" asked Swift.

"About a month. I never thought to have found her so ill. I thought there could be nothing worse than her indifference to her life, but yet there was, For somehow—whether 't was she



had hurried down the valley of the shadow with an unnatural speed for one of her age and strength, or whether 't was the spring coming, I know not, but somehow she had grown afear'd of death. And 't was too late, for she was very sick, though still walking about when I returned. She 'd say to me: 'I don't want to die, Frank. I thought I did, but now I'm so sick I'm afear'd on 't. Don't let me die. Take me to America, where you think I shall get well, but I dursn't, for she was not strong enough to bear the voyage. And then this fever came. That's but a few days since."

"Poor dear Essie!" cried Swift in a trembling voice. "She would weep if she heard of a stranger that died young, and say what a dreadful thing it was to be cut off in the prime. She seemed so full of life, I cannot yet believe there's no hope."

"You will presently then see there's no room for it," returned Francis. "There is no room now for anything but repentance. And what can that avail?"

"Young man," returned Swift, "with God I trust it may, though not with you. He knows my blindness, and how much I have erred through that—how much through wilful sin."

"Were you to repent for a hundred years, and lash yourself worse than an enthusiast monk," said Francis, "'t would not recall Essie to life, nor give me back— Well, no matter."

"Mr. Mordaunt," returned Swift solemnly, "if I could at this moment offer my miserable life in exchange for hers, 'tis inexpressible how gladly I would do it."

"There's but one thing more that either you or I can do for her," said Francis, "and that is to be with her before she dies."

They spurred their horses and trotted along the road by the river. The slow tears coursed each other down Swift's cheeks as he rode, and he prayed long and earnestly that God would of His mercy spare the life of Esther Vanhomrigh, or if that might not be, that He would graciously receive her spirit, remembering her many virtues, and blotting out her sins from His book, or adding them to the sum of those for which the erring man now supplicating Him must one day answer.

As they went on, the few and twinkling lights disappeared from the roadside cottages. The full white moon was high in the cloudless deep of heaven, and the sounds of the warm summer night were all about their path; the splash of leaping fish, the sleepy chirrup of birds disturbed by some night-wandering creature; the song of the reed-warbler, the persistent



churring of the night-jar, and the occasional hoot of an owl, far off on some ancestral tree. It was such an exquisite May night, full of the mystery and beauty of moonlight and the scent of hawthorn, as makes the earth an Eden in which none but lovers should walk—happy lovers or young poets, whose large eyes, so blind in the daylight world of men, can see God walking in the Garden. Somewhere, no doubt, in this wide beautiful world of night, those ever new creations were looking round with wonder and delight on their inheritance, but here on the banks of the Liffey, there was none to enter into it. The weary labourers slept in their closed cottages, and nothing human was stirring except these two men, hurrying along the white road with no wish but to put it behind them as quickly as possible; men united by a common sorrow, but divided by bitter feelings of resentment and remorse.

Meantime at Cellbridge old Ann was anxiously awaiting the return of Master Francis. She was grown really old now, and though still strong enough in body to perform the functions of a nurse, she was nervous and unable to control her invalid. Esther had always refused to keep her bed. She sat propped up in a large chair by the fire. All day she had been breathing with difficulty, but in the evening she had seemed better and fallen into an uneasy slumber. Presently she woke, but her manner was so strange that though she said little, Ann feared she was wandering in her mind. She bade the old woman bring out and spread before her certain dresses lying by in a wardrobe; fine clothes for which she had found little use during the past few years. One by one she looked at them all, and had them put away again, till at last a *négligé* of white silk brocade was unfolded from its wrappings of paper.

"There, there!" she cried, "I care nothing for the mode. I will have it white. Dress me in that."

"Alas, my pretty dear miss," returned the old nurse, "the dead may wear nought but woollen."

Esther smiled.

"Come hither, Ann," she said, and took the nurse's hand when she was come close up to her. "You mistake. 'Tis no wonder you should, but 'tis all a mistake. I am not in a decline, as poor Moll was. Something dreadful came, I cannot remember what, but it touched my heart and turned it into a stone." And she laid Ann's hand on her thin bosom. "'Tis a fearful pain—no, 'tis worse than pain, to walk about with a great



stone in your bosom, and no doubt I must have died of it if he had not come. But he did come while I slept, and touched my heart himself. You can feel now 'tis quite warm and beats again. I am well this morning and, Ann, I am going to be married. My mamma will be pleased, won't she?"

"Oh, my poor lamb!" cried the old woman. "Pray recollect yourself and think of your latter end."

Esther laughed feebly. "Thou old infidel! Do I not look well? Oh, sure I must! Make haste now to dress my hair, for I dare not be late. He was ever exact."

She sat bolt upright in her chair, and with trembling fingers the old woman began to comb and pin up her thick hair.

"Why, Ann, what are you doing?" asked Esther impatiently. "Where are my curls?"

It was years since the mode of wearing a few curls loose on the neck had gone out, and she had long abandoned it. Ann, obedient to her fancy, arranged her fair curls in the old way. Then with extraordinary strength she rose, and pulling off her wrapper, began to put on the white *négligé*. Old Ann, seeing her not to be dissuaded, helped her on with it, and put more wraps round her. But she walked to the window letting them trail off her as she went. Drawing aside the curtain, "Sunshine!" she said, smiling to herself, as she looked out on the moonlight; "'tis well, very well."

And she returned smiling to her chair, as though she had pleasant thoughts. Indeed her wandering fancy had conjured up again the scene on the steps of the London church, on that May morning ten years ago.

"I must have 'em," she cried, "a great posy of 'em. 'Twill be better than pearls for my wedding, for they do say pearls mean tears. And I won't have any more tears, no, nor so much as think of them, for I have shed such a many—— Ah! no one would believe!—— Ann, call Thomas, and bid him bring me a fine posy of the blue forget-me-nots from the meadow by the river. There's plenty of 'em there, all growing together. He can't miss seeing them."

"God ha' mercy on you, Miss Essie, my dear!" ejaculated the old woman trembling. "Pray, pray to Him to give you back your senses before you go."

"If you'll not call him, I must myself," returned Esther pettishly, and rose to her feet, crying out feebly, "Thomas! Thomas!"



Ann would have replaced her in her chair, but could not, and the scant tears of age began to gather in her dim eyes. While she was still attempting to calm and restrain her nursling, she heard the creaking tread of men in riding boots coming up the stairs as softly as they might. She desisted from her attempts as Francis, opening the door, stood on one side and let the Dean pass before him.

Swift, lividly pale, but making a great effort to restrain his emotion, advanced two steps into the room and paused. He had expected to see a figure stretched upon the bed, perhaps unconscious; perhaps alive enough to whisper reproach or forgiveness. He saw Esther fully dressed, upright, though leaning with one hand on the foot of the bed. She was fearfully changed since he had seen her last. Her cheeks were hollow; her neck and arms, a few months ago so round and white, were wasted and bloodless. He was shocked at her appearance, yet it was by no means so deathlike as it had been earlier in the day; for her eyes glittered with an unnatural brightness, and there was a feverish colour in her cheeks. As soon as she saw him she stepped up to him with surprising firmness, and putting her two hands on his shoulders, said, looking at him tenderly—

“So you are come, Cadenus.”

“Yes, yes, I came immediately, Missessy,” he answered, pulling down one of her hands and holding it in his own.

“I knew you would be punctual to your time,” she returned. “I am glad the morning is so fair. Do you remember what the old woman said? ‘Happy the bride the sun shines on’!”

“Get her back, and let me close this door,” said Francis.

“No, no, let us go out,” said Esther. “They all talk as though I were sick, but I am quite cured, am I not, Cadenus? You know how.”

“I trust in God it may be so,” answered Swift, choking with tears and bowing his face upon her hand.

“Yes, I am very well. Let us make haste, for the people are all waiting to see. Why should we hide? I want them all to see the happiest, proudest woman in the world. Your bride—O Heavens, Cadenus!—your wife.”

And flinging her arms round his neck she buried her head in his bosom.

“O God,” he groaned, “O God!”

Then, controlling his anguish by a great effort, he spoke gently but firmly in her ear,



"Essie, I implore you in the name of our Saviour to put away these deceitful fancies, and remember what has passed and who and where we are."

She raised her head and stood before him, looking in his face with an anxious bewildered gaze.

"Essie," he went on with clasped hands and the tears running down his cheeks, "I have come hither to acknowledge my fault and earnestly beg your forgiveness."

As he spoke, the light of reason slowly dawned in her eyes, and the brilliancy of fever began to fade. She made a step or two backward and caught hold of the bedpost with one hand.

"Hesskin," he said, "I have been a poor friend to you."

She fixed her eyes on him with an intent look of full recognition, and leaned back against the bed.

Francis closed the door gently. Esther did not speak, but, the look which she had fixed upon Swift grew to be a look of horror and anguish.

"Forgive me," he tried to say, covering his face with his hand.

She did not move, except that he thought he saw her stagger and stepped forward to catch hold of her. She audibly gasped, and made a movement as though to repel his hands. Then again she looked on him with that dreadful gaze. It seemed to him an eternity that he stood with bowed head beneath it, but it was really but a few seconds. Then she fell backwards on the bed, and before a hand could be stretched to save her, rolled heavily on to the floor. So quickly, they knew not how it was done, Swift and Francis lifted her back on to the bed, and each peered in her face, oblivious of the other. The stamp of death was set upon it. Old Ann put a feather into Francis' hand, and he held it to his cousin's mouth, but neither of the two men eagerly bending over her could be certain whether or no she yet breathed. Surely, surely she must. Unconsciously their hands met upon her bosom, and beneath those two hands, touching each other now for the last time, the stormy heart of Esther Vanhomrigh heaved once and was for ever still.



## A STUDY OF MR. GEORGE MEREDITH.



"OBSERVATION is the most enduring of the pleasures of life." This is Mr. George Meredith's conclusion, as expressed in one of his latest books. It is a dictum of the Master who is our greatest living novelist,—of a student who has long and minutely investigated the springs and aims of human action, and it forms an apt comment on the writer's own attitude and the impression left by his work in fiction.

Meredith is a terribly clear-sighted psychological observer, a keen and subtle analyst of character, and the more obscure workings of the mind. As a genial, or enthralling teller of a story he does not take a high place, rather he often falls into the anomalous and scarcely defensible position of a novelist who does not amuse. Despite his great dramatic power, and brilliant wit and fancy, he can be hard reading, and does not always succeed in laying an irresistible grasp on the attention. The plot of his stories is seldom much elaborated. The narrative is often merely brought together (with great skill) on the single thread of some central personality, around which the action develops, while the background may be even lavishly filled in with subordinate characters, incident and epigrammatic dissertation. His personages are complete and complex men and women, dramatically presented, drawn with much humour and insight, and moving in an atmosphere laden with thought and poetry, or iridescent with imagery, wit, and fancy; each of the figures having, as it were, a glass side, or peep-hole in its breast, through which we may peer into its soul and discern the machinery and springs of action. Even his brilliant epigrammatic faculty is chiefly used as an instrument for the delicate probing and discrimination of motive. The interest hangs on the development of character, incident is used to display, events to mould it, while the less successful among Meredith's works are those in which this tendency is allowed to run riot. Figures such as Roy



Richmond, Alvan, even Emilia, Nevil Beauchamp, or Victor Radnor (though in some cases studies from life, and admirably treated), are, in their essence, attempts to convey impressions of individualities of unusual strength and attraction, clever if somewhat wild fantasias on the strange and wonderful phenomena of personal influence or magnetism.

Mr. Meredith's latest novel, 'One of our Conquerors,' contains a lesson of sympathy with the rebel who has Nature on his side against convention. He punishes his insurgents heavily, in good orthodox fashion, knowing that the plea of the exceptional nature, a law unto itself, must be handled, like dynamite, with infinite precaution and many safeguards; but his treatment of a difficult situation shows rare justness of view, daring humour, and a right and noble sentiment, wholly free from cant, bravado, or hypocrisy. The awakening of Nesta's apprehension of the realities of life, of Nesta, the fire-souled and vivid, with her "resonant nature," "enigma's mouth and eyes of morning," forms, as it were a pendant to that of the eager youth, Richard Feverel, thus connecting Mr. Meredith's latest novel with one of his earliest, in a curious completeness. 'One of our Conquerors' is a book for the elect, who, as its writer says, "see signification and catch flavour." Its manner may sometimes lend itself to parody, or stave off the sluggish-minded, but "there is no grasping one who quickens," says Mr. Meredith, and his richly suggestive method may well be treacherous in less inspired moments.

Mr. Meredith possesses a marvellous gift of intuition, which enables him to follow the most intricate involutions of the human mind, and trace the formation of character through the complex action of native disposition and outer circumstance. The growth of an intellect, the unfolding of a character on trial, the sway of the passions, subtle varieties of love, ambition or egotism, antipathies, varieties, idiosyncrasies, are examined with a strangely acute vision. What, for instance, can be finer than the progress of Clara Middleton's gradual apprehension of Sir Willoughby Pattern's nature? The Egoist, in all good faith and infatuation, unfolds himself to his promised bride, by monotonous disquisitions on his eternal theme, while as she grasps the drift of his amazing revelations her own character develops, and she rises to the level of the effort required to separate herself from him. The situation is adroitly handled, and most skilfully unravelled. Clara, by applying her touchstone of truth and nobleness, obtains the key to the cloaked nature of her betrothed, while he is still



able to deceive and dazzle all around. Her position resembles that of the disillusioned mortal who had been kissed by the Fairy Queen, and knew her to be but a shrivelled hag on a broomstick, though for others she still retained the semblance of a fair and gracious lady.

"Blood to the hero—blood! Brains to the veiled virginal doll, the heroine!" cries Mr. Meredith in a burst of indignation with the painted wax puppets of the conventional novelist. His own "radiant" Diana, the "flecked heroine of reality," with her "thrilling and topping voice," her "spirit leaping and shining like mountain water," her "delicious chatter or museful sparkle in listening that quickened every sense of life," her sentences that "fell with a ring and chimed," has of "brain stuff" almost a superfluity. Yet with all her quick-wittedness she has hardly a touch of cynicism. Her full-blooded healthy nature, warm heart, and capacious soul, could not confine itself within the rigid limits of well-meant but narrow conventionalities. She does not defy the world from bravado or mere love of turbulence, but simply overflows barriers which are too strait for the satisfaction of her effervescent nature. "Let me be myself, whatever the martyrdom," she desperately cries. Mr. Meredith is a discriminating friend and champion of women, and "Diana of the Crossways" is in its essence one long plea for increased liberty for her sex, and its exemption from the dogmatic tyranny of the "class that is governed in its estimates of character by accepted patterns of conduct." The book is indeed written with the avowed object of showing how a beautiful, talented, and warm-hearted woman may pass through the most equivocal situations, ungenial married life, divorce proceedings, want of money; be the trusted "Egeria" of those in high place, and yet remain pure, high-minded, and stainless, in spite of damning appearances. It is a lesson in tolerance and thinking no evil. The outline of Diana's character and the main situations in the book are well known to be borrowed, yet Mr. Meredith has set his own stamp upon them, Diana's racy drollery is indeed scarcely seized, though we are repeatedly informed of its existence, but her nervous Irish nature is most thoroughly realized, and made to account for her strange and sudden mistakes in conduct. "Irishmen, like horses, are bundles of nerves, it is explained, and still more Irishwomen!" If Diana sometimes rushes off the track, it must be set down to her spirited and highly strung nature. "When I drove down that night," she says (the night she revealed the fateful secret), "I am



certain I had my clear wits, but I felt like a bolt. I saw things, but at too swift a rate for the conscience of them."

This portrait of Diana was evidently with Mr. Meredith a labour of love. A sweet, simple child like Lucy Desborough is not his ideal, and cynical touches intrude even on the most charming passages written in her praise. We feel that the author would himself never have fallen in love with her, and we hardly dare to make fools of ourselves under his coldly critical eye; as he calmly points out and dilates on her attractions, in the "Keepsake" style of description, blue eyes, golden curls, sweetness, innocence, and — "Love's penny whistle." Mrs. Lovell, "the distinguished sitter in an easy drawing-room chair," jumps much more naturally with his humour than even stern and tragic Rhoda Fleming, with her painfully learned correction and gentility. Artistic innocence suits him better than blushing simplicity. He is most successful with complex and cultured natures, for he is too subtle and ingenious to deal quite happily with genuine artlessness. His style does not suit such portraiture. Mr. Meredith's real goddess is Mind; simplicity he exalts, no doubt sincerely enough, but with a taint of the hyperbolical.

In the treatment of Diana, his epigrammatic force and swiftness of expression is at its best, and his powers are employed in depicting a figure with which they are essentially in sympathy. Without departing from truth, he possesses in a high degree the poetic faculty of transporting his reader into a world of his own creation, where even the most extraordinary behaviour may appear natural and inevitable in the scheme of things which is for the time to be accepted. Thus Diana's perhaps overbrilliant talk would appear to be pitched in a natural key. Her sayings are the crowning froth and sparkle on a goblet full of heady and stimulating liquor, not isolated flashes in a world of flat commonplace, or the vain, yet spirited efforts of the one blood-mare in a team of draught-horses to start the waggon at gallop up hill. The pace throughout has been quickened to fall in step with her, and the pages fly past sparkling with dry keen wit or sharply cut epigram, not wanting in the "idea which is the only vital breath." The moral is subordinate, and yet so clear, that the story might have been written as a vehicle for that alone. A rich thoughtfulness and reminiscent imagination throws illuminating shafts over a wide field of vexed questions of the day, as well as on those problems which are always with us. It is true that a certain strain does often disfigure the



writing, but in spite of the "pointed flame which tempts the flat-minded to call her actress," the radiant Diana, with her warm Irish impulsiveness, is a living and sympathetic personality, and one of the most striking and complete figures in the author's long gallery of heroines.

But as a demonstrator of character Mr. Meredith has much else to show. His best creations are supple and living, exhibiting growth and development. His conceptions are elastic—he does not throw his men and women into cast-iron moulds, or distribute to each neatly labelled packets of qualities. He has much understanding of childhood, and the passive receptivity of undeveloped minds. He notes the fantastic, dream-like proportions events assume to a child's mind; their interjectional nature, through lack of knowledge of the links connecting cause and effect. Harry Richmond's father became his boyish hero to such an extent, that all that took place in his absence, "was like music going on till the curtain should lift and reveal my father to me." But, all the same, though "I studied him eagerly, I know, and yet quite unconsciously, *I came to no conclusion.*" "Boys are always putting down the ciphers of their observations of people beloved by them, but do not add up a sum total."

'The Ordeal of Richard Feverel,' is a fine study of the effects of an abnormal moral education. "Other men were tried by puny ailments, the Feverels were searched and shaken by one tremendous shock as of a stroke of Heaven's lightning"—the so-called ordeal. This is only, however, what may be said of most intense, delicately balanced, or highly-strung natures. Concentration of interest, the capacity for living in a world of ideas, may blind them to much, and be proof against "puny" strokes; but such minds when once thrown from their imaginative pinnacle are totally incapable of again scaling the airy height which they had reached by means of an unconscious idealism. They would be unable, in fact, to maintain themselves there now that the cobweb bands, spun by inexperienced hope and enthusiasm, to sustain them in their godlike pose on unsubstantial footing, have been broken through, crushed and ruthlessly destroyed. Unwittingly, the provident Sir Austin, in guarding his son from free contact with realities, was carefully preparing him to suffer the more certainly and intensely in his passage through the ordeal of the first practical awakening of the pure-minded Dreamer.

The philosopher of the 'Pilgrim's Scrip' is treated with



delicate insight and a keen though quiet sense of humour. Of the specifically humorous characters, Mrs. Berry is no doubt the most successful. Other figures in this work ('The Ordeal of Richard Feverel'), though intended to afford a relief to the intense seriousness of the interest, and informed with wit and wisdom of the right Meredithian quality, incline nevertheless to the stagey or burlesque. Such are the dyspeptic Uncle Hippias, the heavy Benson, Mrs. Caroline Grandison, or even Adrian Harley, the "Wise Youth."

Rollicking fun or genial drollery do not flow so easily from Mr. Meredith's pen as the aphorisms of the 'Pilgrim's Scrip'; even Diana's wit is over-ingenious, and often a mere play of antithetical brilliances. That curiously fantastic burlesque medley, 'The Shaving of Shagpat,' is written throughout in a mock-heroic vein, with images often grotesquely grandiose, and a purposely inflated style. The exuberance of fancy and the versatility it shows are, however, simply amazing, and it has a rare poetical quality. The story of Bhanavar the Beautiful, for example, the conception of the terrible sorceress whose beauty could only be preserved through the annual sacrifice of one who loved her, is very fine, and there is much fanciful humour and ironic power throughout the book. Published in 1855, it already shows a singular aptitude for aphoristic writing.

Mr. Meredith's instinct for humour is not always quite true. It is too far-fetched and elaborate, too self-conscious, or tinged with satire and cynicism. The attempts at pure comedy are often abortive, and but poor fooling. Mrs. Sumfit, Master Gammon and the dumplings; Tom Cogglesby and Mrs. Melchisedec Harrington at the Dolphin, and other scenes of the like nature, though evidently intended to be side-splitting, command but a forced laughter. Mr. Meredith's claims as a humorist rest rather on his more delicate exhibitions of the quality. The exposition of the workings of Sir Willoughby's mind abounds in fine touches, as does the Countess de Saldar de Sancorvo's campaign against class distinctions in Evan Harrington. Sir Austin Feverel is treated with immovable features, but with a keen and relishing perception of refined absurdity.

Mr. Meredith's humour is connected with his point of view, and is a part of his philosophy. He maintains for the most part an attitude of suspended judgment, the posture of a patient unprejudiced spectator, discriminating delicate shades of conduct, or motive. He tells us that his aim is to show men and their



passions at "blood-heat," keeping himself "calm as a statue of Memnon in prostrate Egypt." A "passive receptivity of shine and shade I hold it good to aim at." It would seem that Mr. Meredith is not aware that "blood-heat" is electric and cannot be imparted without feeling as a generator. A hollow imitation of the laughter of the gods, is apt to ring falsely in the mouths of mortals.

Life to Mr. Meredith is a game, though it is true he watches the moves of the pieces with keen and serious interest. His characters are machines which he expounds to us. He is a psychological showman.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, walk this way! Here is an interesting model never before placed under the microscope. Observe the dull blood running through the heart, how slow and pulseless! Note that subtle manifestation of egoism, that burst of emotion! This exhibit, on the contrary, is morally well put together, and shows the action of a noble unselfishness. This interesting creature has gleams of poetry and grace,"—and so on, and so on, till the brain grows wearied and confused with hearkening to the whirr of the wheels of our mental clockwork. This dissection of the human soul is, however, done with marvellous dramatic skill, and an exquisitely handled knife. The exposition is not *doctrinaire* or dogmatic, but rather empirical and living, proceeding by examples rather than by theory, and bears the impress of a mind of high quality and rarest insight, being in fact, after all deductions, the work of true genius.

In respect of style, Mr. Meredith is a worshipper of the well-said, of wit, of the art of "condensing our purest sense to golden sentences to strike roots in the mind," though sometimes, to use his own ingenious simile, his phrases are rather "lapidary sentences, having the value of chalk eggs which lure the thinker to sit." Like his Diana, he "thinks in flashes," rather than continuously and connectedly. Perhaps a certain want of method in thought, some mental untidiness, or effervescence, is favourable to the production of art and epigram. In a well-ordered, neatly-arranged mind, where everything is labelled and laid in its place, it must be more difficult for incongruities to rush together, strike a spark, or discover their subtle affinities. Mr. Meredith is a concoctor of witty aphorisms, a coiner of antithetical phrases. Sometimes even words are issued with his stamp. "A writer who is not servile and has insight must coin from his own mint," he boldly tells us. In practice, however, he



is more apt to twist a word slightly from its original signification, or force its meaning than actually to add to the currency. Thus he says that Alvan had a "hissing" reputation, *i.e.* a reputation that stirred the snakes and geese of the world. At other times he will invent somewhat inorganic and cumbrous compound words, as when he tells us that at the cry of invasion England was in a "poultry-flutter." A "rapid phraser" like his own Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, who detested the analysis of her sentences, his expressions having often an "outline in vagueness, and are flung out to be apprehended, not dissected." This method might be described as an impressionist use of words as opposed to the realistic, by which meaning is clearly made out and syllabled, instead of being shadowed forth by implication. For this author is an adept in the indirect conveyance of meaning, and has a curious habit of incidentally throwing out remarks which illuminate his own production, serving as hints for criticism. He has a living use of words, his diction is his own, a part of himself, highly expressive in its irregular strength, its half-suggestions, its adumbrative vagueness, and metaphors which flash an idea too exquisitely imaginative to be otherwise conveyed. A struggle against the commonplace is, however, too obvious in his work. Abruptness, elliptical sentences, strained meanings, imperfectly given allusions, and such "tricks of magniloquence and obscurity," betray the effort for effect. These are, however, the faults of a quick-witted, active-minded writer, whose nimble brain tempts him to play pranks to show his agility. Compelled to keep pace with the slower apprehension of his reader, he bounds around him like a young dog who is taken out for a walk by his master and is anxious to hasten the steps of his sedate biped companion.

Like Browning, Mr. Meredith is sometimes open to the charge of using the wealth of his vocabulary to disguise his meaning. He resembles Browning also in his fondness for psychological dissertation, and in his brilliant enigmatical flashes of wit, and quick forcible phrasing. Humorists are difficult, he informs us, "it is a part of their humour to puzzle our wits."

In all his books there is an abundance of material, but also a failing in artistic care, choice and severity of rejection, together with a want of consideration for the reader which fatigues and repels. As a writer Mr. Meredith seeks to dazzle and impose rather than to please. He is whimsical and wilful, and often we have to wait, as the conspirators on Monte Motterone waited for



Agostino, until he has "exploded the last of his train of conceits." He abounds in charmingly discursive and desultory paragraphs, containing quaint discussions of abstract matters, conducted by means of metaphor and allusion. For Mr. Meredith has an allusive mind, catching at similes and figures of speech, and he expresses himself sometimes with an almost Oriental profusion of metaphor. An exuberantly fanciful vein often appears in his work, for his strong poetical feeling seeks utterance in imagery. In respect of some attributes of style, he is often compared to Carlyle or Jean Paul Richter; indeed the large number of writers to whom he has been likened for different qualities is strong evidence of the variety of his power. At times he resorts to a condensed shorthand manner, jottings and memoranda for sentences and paragraphs, rather than the things themselves. At others the strain for smartness is painfully obvious. What, for example, are we to make of a heroine who "turns her inward flutterer to steel"? or a hero who "pummels an obmutescent mass to the confusion of a conceivable epic"? His style shows indeed the most curious mixture of stilted effort, with supple and imaginative plasticity of expression.

Nature is used as a running accompaniment, touched lightly and occasionally, but with a master hand. Gem-like passages, perhaps but a few lines long, give vivid and poetic glimpses of landscape, and stand out in welcome relief from these pages of psychological subtleties.

But these graceful paragraphs are rare, single sentences containing some exquisite image or suggestion being more frequent. The play of "white sunlight on the fringed smooth roll of water by a weir," is finely felt; or exquisite little vignettes are given of the Kentish Downs lying in the evening light "stretched out like a web of fine grey silk;" of an English midland county meadow fringed with tasselled larches; of night in the Adriatic, sunrise on the Alps, or a great murky sunset spreading its deep coloured hues that "seemed like a great sorrowing over earth." The chapter "Wilming Weir," in 'Emilia in England,' contains some fine descriptive writing. It is couched in a strain of poetic mysticism and pictorial feeling, which makes it possible, perhaps, to trace an influence from the author of the 'Blessed Damozel,' and the 'House of Life' throughout the book, and notably in the heroine. Emilia, who is the representative of Passion, or "Noble strength on fire," contrasted with the Nice Feelings, Fine Shades, and Sentimentalism of the 'Ladies of Brookfield,' is certainly



treated with something of the indescribable poetic feeling of Rossetti's allegorical manner of personification.

Mr. Meredith's books are "soul's tragedies," though the questioning is rather of earthly than heavenly mysteries, so far as it is roughly possible to disengage the two categories. The mental crises through which his characters pass are, however, tremendous enough, and are concerned with some of the most intricate and important moral problems. Mr. Meredith's work is morally sound, for he never tricks out false passion and selfishness in meretricious attractions, but a keen and clear perception of the mixed springs and aims of human action is always pathetic, and must inspire some measure of gentle tolerance. Often, too, his steadily-held divining-rod trembles as it indicates the presence of a pure fountain of truth and feeling, and the real heart of the man breaks through his *role* of impartiality. For a subtle irony clings around much of his work, giving hints that, interesting and ingenious little machines as we may be, we are buzzing, whirring, and fussing about, without a real object—in fact, we are only whirligigs spinning round in a circle, catching our own tails, or working a treadmill without advancing one inch further, for all our desperate activity. This, however, is chiefly to be gathered by inference, for reforms are advocated, brighter, clearer, and more hopeful views are constantly enforced. Woman is to be lifted up and humanised, and the standard of moral acquirement raised, politics purified, social distinctions rationalised, and the natural and true in feeling vindicated against the artificial or insincere.

Mr. Meredith's mind is nobly undogmatic. Like his own Shibli Bagarag the Barber, he is a Destroyer of Illusions, and whets his sword to reap a goodly crop. But his mission is not merely to destroy; he can also utter noble reproof to a world which is too prone to imagine "those to be at our nature's depths, who are impudent enough to expose its muddy shallows."

J. A. NEWTON-ROBINSON.





## THE ROMANCE OF MARY MACADAM.

### PART II.

BY EDWARD A. ARNOLD.



### III.

SINCE our arrival at Fort Seneca we had received frequent visits from parties of Indians belonging to the various tribes or nations, who came to trade with us, and expressed amaze at the number of our people, and the extent and strength of the works ; some even expostulated with the Commandant. Was this, they asked, the trading post for which leave had been given, or was it intended by the white men to establish themselves thus strongly for the purpose of ousting the Indians from their lands ? For trade, a smaller company and fewer buildings were enough. But here were stockades and arms and defences, which breathed war and conquest.

The Commandant was not the man to appease their suspicions, and remonstrance often ended in threats as they left the fort. He laughed at these threats, but wiser heads than his were troubled at the prospect ; the Agent especially warned him of the danger, but uselessly, for he swore nothing would please him more than for the cursed Indians to attack us and get a taste of English steel.

At length matters drew to a crisis ; a deputation of chiefs came into the camp and had an interview with the Commandant, recounting their grievances and praying their white brothers to retire from their territories, as they had no desire to trade, and were strong enough to defend themselves against the King's enemies without aid. Upon this the Commandant flew into a rage, and would have dismissed them without more ado, but was presently persuaded to postpone decision until consultation could be held on so serious a matter ; and the chiefs were told that their petition should be considered and an answer given them on



the day of the full moon, then just ten days' distant. The news spread like wildfire through the camp; but few weighed the importance of it, and the reckless soldiers were only eager to hasten the time when they could cure the impudence of the Indians, as they termed it. But the Agent and those officers who knew the helplessness of our position if we defied the red men, and yet could not bear the ignominy of deserting the post, were terribly put about; nor were they relieved by the manner of the Commandant, who seemed determined not to yield an inch or even temporize with the chiefs at their next visit. Neither could he be persuaded to send a despatch to the city for aid; if it came to fighting, were not fifty Englishmen a match for all the warriors of the Six Nations? No argument had any effect upon his attitude, and it was evident that he was as eager to risk fighting as he was confident of a successful issue.

Now there chanced to be in the camp an Indian from one of the Mohawk castles, fallen sick during a hunting-expedition, and placed in our charge by his comrades, who, luckily for him, were in need of powder for their guns, or they would have left him to die in the forest rather than come to the fort for his especial benefit. He was marvellously grateful for our care, which had soon remedied a simple disorder, and hearing what was passing, urged that at all hazards a breach with the tribes should be avoided. This was a matter that rested with the Commandant to decide, but the Agent was so confirmed in his own misgivings as to the issue of a struggle, unless some prospect of relief or reinforcement of the garrison were held out, that he concerted a plan with this Indian to fetch aid from the city ere it was too late. The faithful fellow at once started off on his mission, but with such secrecy that, being missed, he was roundly abused in camp for deserting his friends with intention, as was believed, to expose the weakness of our defences to the hostile tribes. His departure added to the Commandant's stubbornness, and when the day of the full moon approached, little doubt was felt that evening would see the alliance broken, and leave us garrisoning a post in an enemy's country.

Before noon the six chiefs came in, each attended by three warriors, who were not permitted to pass the stockade. The Commandant received them in the open space within the quadrangle attended by the whole military force drawn up under arms. The chiefs had the first word.

"Brother," said the Sachem who was their spokesman, "you



bade us come here to-day to hear the answer of the great King, our common Father, to the petition we sent him ; we are very thankful to him for listening to us. See, we have brought the ancient Covenant Chain which he gave to his children ; it has been kept bright and clean, and has joined us securely together in friendship, so that neither thunder nor lightning could break it. Now we wish to add some new links to it, for we fear rust will creep in, and the chain become weak and snap unless it is made new. Formerly there were plenty of our young men to keep it bright and strong ; but since this fort has been built they have been busy in trading with you, and have left their castles and attended to other things. Some, too, are angry at the encroachment on our lands ; they say that paths are cut through the country and many houses are built ; that soon there will be no room for us on the land, and we shall not be able to live in our castles. Truly the clouds hang heavy over us ; but we hope that the great King will renew this chain and leave his children alone to maintain it in their ancient homes. Thus the sun shall shine out again, and make all things bright for the King's children in the city and in the forest alike."

Then the Commandant replied :—

"Brethren, I have invited you here in the name of the great King, our common Father, to receive the answer to your petition. It gives me great satisfaction to see this Covenant Chain so strong and bright, and to hear that you have kept it inviolate and free from rust. We too wish it to remain firm and unbroken as it has been from the beginning. Therefore the great King has sent us here to build this fort ; he remembers his children ; he knows that they have enemies ; he puts forth his strong arm to protect them ; he will make our deeds the pledge of his friendship. Like you, we are his children, and obey his voice ; he commands us to stand firm, joining hands with you. So the power of the French shall wane, and your enemies shall perish, and the land shall have peace. Let us therefore solemnly renew this Covenant ; then go your ways homewards, resting assured that the sun will shine forth again, and all clouds vanish quickly away."

Now the quiet dignity of this short speech was the result of the most strenuous efforts on the part of his brother-officers, who had tardily persuaded the Commandant of the impolicy of any passionate outburst ; but evidently he had great difficulty in controlling his temper and schooling himself in civility towards



the chiefs. This became more and more apparent in the conversation which followed, as the point at issue developed itself. The Indians were no less determined about our retiring from the fort than we were resolute to stay; and all the tact in the world seemed unlikely to prevent the conclave ending in an open breach. But our Commandant was not a man to beat about the bush or butter his words long, and the red warriors matched him in their fiery tones and impatient gestures. At last the excitement grew to a head when the Chief who was holding the Covenant Chain stepped forward, and flung it on the ground at the Commandant's feet, exclaiming:—

“Behold the links are riven—the Covenant is broken! Since the great King hearkens not, we are his children no longer; we will be his enemies, we will war against him, aye, even as long as the Sun and the Moon shall endure.”

The others instantly shouted assent, and then abruptly turned away and strode towards the gates, followed by a volley of oaths from the Commandant to the effect that they might do their worst, but nothing should stir him from the fort, not all the natives on the Continent and the French into the bargain, if they tried till the crack of doom.

Orders were given to close the gates at once, and that evening every one felt the suspense which forebodes a storm gathering whereof none can calculate the violence or predict the issue.

Next day we had time to survey our position. Not an Indian was to be seen, but we knew they must be lurking near, and that a siege was imminent. Our force was sufficient, aided by the defences, to ward off a direct attack, and a large supply of provisions had been stored in view of a portion of the troops wintering in the fort. Access to the water was also secure, and large cisterns of bark had been erected close to the houses for additional convenience. But now that it was impossible for the main body to return to the city in the autumn, the rations would clearly fail to support so large a garrison throughout the winter, and thus our very strength was at the same time a source of fatal weakness.

We knew the stubbornness of the Indians too well to think they would ever grow tired of besieging us, and allow a safe retreat. But even supposing that were so, how could we hope to find the way unguided through deep snow to the river? how descend it without Batteaux? Worst of all was our inability to send word of affairs to the city. It was a forlorn hope to call for volunteers to run the gauntlet, but two men who offered them-



selves were promptly despatched. Poor fellows! We learnt afterwards that they were scalped only one day out from camp. No messenger could hope to evade the keen watch of the Indian scouts without a far more perfect knowledge of the country than any one in camp possessed; in short, starvation must soon stare us in the face, however successfully we might repel the fury of our enemies.

But no one seemed inclined to give in without a struggle; there were still several things wanting towards the completion of our defences, notably the clearing a wider space between the fort and the forest, so that the enemy might have no shelter from our fire. This work was immediately set about with vigour, and, strange to say, continued day by day without interruption; immunity from attack gradually restored confidence, and at length begat recklessness, and doubt as to the reality of peril. Soldiers began to venture further from the fort, and to leave their arms, neglecting such tiresome precautions as unnecessary. But our illusion was soon dispelled. One day when a party was out wood-cutting, we were startled by hearing shots in the distance; instantly there was a call to arms, and a strong relief prepared to advance into the forest; but no sooner had they sallied from the stockade than they were themselves assailed by a heavy fire from the line of trees, compelling them to retire from the unseen foe, and not a man of the five wood-cutters ever returned into camp.

From that day the siege began in earnest; there was no means of ascertaining the exact number of the enemy, who kept within the shelter of the forest, and never attacked us in the day-time, but harassed us continually with night assaults, demanding an intensity of vigilance on our part more irksome than the actual fighting.

The bastions proved invaluable, by enabling us to concentrate fire upon any threatened spot; and so good a watch was kept, that although the Indians often crept close up to the palisades unnoticed, they were always discovered and driven back before they had time to demolish or surmount the formidable wood-work. They tried indeed every variety of assault, sometimes upon several parts of the line simultaneously, sometimes uniting their efforts against what they imagined a weak spot; they were not less active on the river side, and from their canoes nearly effected a breach one night in the stake fence projecting into the river, till then unguarded as less liable to attack. They



also attempted to set fire to the palisade ; but fortune favoured us in frustrating their design, and next day our men brought into camp all the faggots they had heaped against the fence before they were driven back.

After a month of almost incessant night attacks, their ardour seemed suddenly to cool, and they evidently determined upon the slower and surer method of starving us out.

We would fain have hoped they were weary of the enterprise and had disappeared ; but a *sortie* from the camp was fired upon immediately, proving how closely we were invested.

It was not till then that the Agent allowed a rumour of coming relief to leak out, and hinted at the fidelity of the Indian whose disappearance had been branded for treachery. The idea was eagerly caught up and exaggerated into an assured certainty of rescue quite unwarrantable ; for, granted our messenger's safe arrival in the city, it was doubtful whether an immediate relief would be organized, as the despatch only mentioned a probable rupture which had not then occurred ; and if the Indians guarded their rear as vigilantly as they watched us, it would be heavy odds against even a strong force cutting its way successfully into camp. But these considerations were for a time lost sight of in the all-absorbing joy at the faintest prospect of escape. Gradually, however, they forced themselves upon us, as week after week passed without a sign of rescue, and the weather grew colder, and we saw the store of provisions and ammunition diminishing steadily.

Truly "hope deferred maketh the heart sick!" The soldiers fell once more into a state of sullen despair which began to assume the fatal form of neglect of discipline and duty in spite of all the efforts of the officers to revive their spirits: all seemed to have utterly lost heart, and I believe, if the Indians had resumed the offensive, it would have fared ill with a garrison so unnerved.

Suddenly one morning—it was a Sunday, I remember—our ears were saluted by a sharp fusillade in the forest. It acted like magic ; here was the rescue at last ; no laggards this time when the bugle sounded ; men flew to their posts with an alacrity the very reverse of their usual sloth. Hastily a council of officers was held. Was this only a ruse of the enemy to entice us from the fort, or a collision with the relieving force so long expected ? If the latter, much aid might be given by a *sortie*, which was finally resolved upon. Events justified the risk. The Indians,



not having the faintest suspicion of attack, were surrounded while completely off their guard, and numbers shot down before they had time to defend themselves. Flying panic-stricken towards the river they were met by the party from the fort, and suffered heavily before they broke past, and eluded pursuit in the thick forest.

Then rang out cheer after cheer as the rescuers met our soldiers and marched triumphantly into camp; they had come none too soon, for in a few weeks famine would have overtaken us, if our supineness did not sooner result in the fort being stormed. It appeared that our faithful Indian had shown incredible speed in reaching the city, and the Agent's well-known skill in dealing with the savages had procured such implicit reliance on his judgment as to the turn matters would take, that an expedition was at once despatched to our aid, guided by men who knew every inch of the country. How they hastened to relieve us—how in spite of all obstacles they pressed on—how their constant vigilance and precautions against ambuscades were rewarded by the complete surprise and rout of the Indians, we soon learned, and I fear we recked too little of the loss of some brave lives in exultation at delivery from our enemies. Fortunately the influence of panic had greatly weakened resistance, so that the sacrifice was small; but three fine fellows had been shot dead, and one of the officers wounded. I had not seen him brought into camp, but in the evening my father came to me and asked if I would help nurse Captain M——, whose wound, though not dangerous, was of such a nature as would compel him to lie quiet for some time, and render him dependent upon the services of other people. "A woman's hands," said my father, "are better than a man's at this work, and you would like to feel yourself really useful."

I had been too long inured now to the company of men to hesitate, and professed my readiness to enter at once upon my duties. So my father took me to the log house which was to serve as hospital, and opened the door, saying as we entered:—"Captain M——, here is my daughter, who will give you the best attention in her power: I think you will fare better from her than from such rough nurses as the gentlest soldier must be.

"I am deeply indebted to Miss MacAdam," replied a voice from the couch at the further end of the room, "and will endeavour to prove a creditable patient."



The light was dim after the glare outside, but in a moment I recognized the voice. I looked, and there, pale and tired with pain, but handsome as ever, was the face that I had never forgotten, the man who had saved me, saved us all from outrage and insult on the night of the illuminations in the city. How proud I felt at the prospect of repaying the debt we owed him ; how I would speed his recovery if good will and care could hasten it !

There was not really much for me to do, just the few things that a man wants when his right arm is helpless, and movement is painful ; indeed, my chief difficulty was to persuade him to lie still ; he was always jumping up in spite of the pain, to spare me a long reach or a walk across the room, and as he got better, I think he was more nurse than patient. Fast friends we soon became. His life had been full of adventure, and I was a good listener : many a talk too we had about bonny Scotland, for he knew our old home, and the story of our flight. He must have wondered at my eagerness in pestering him with questions, but here was a chance of learning things my father could never be induced to tell, and I could not resist it, treasuring up every scrap of gossip and romance that gave me any tidings of bygone days.

The weeks passed with lightning speed, atoning for the dismal dulness of the siege. Captain M——'s wound healed rapidly ; almost too fast, cried my selfishness, in dismay at the approaching loss of my "patient" ! But the separation came even sooner than I expected ; for there being no probability of any renewed attack beyond the power of the garrison to withstand, the troops of our original company were to return to the city, leaving the rescue party to hold the fort through the winter. With them my father must go ; but Captain M——, though pressed for his wound's sake to do likewise, vowed he was quite recovered, would not desert his regiment, and would spend the winter in camp with them. And so for the second time we parted.

The journey was taken none too soon, for snow fell slightly during the march, and the frost was already severe : had we remained a fortnight longer we should have been buried in the drifts. The soldiers were in such good spirits, and so eager to get home, that favoured by the river current, as yet fortunately unimpeded by ice, the distance to the city was traversed in little more than half the time of our upward course, without accident or danger. But the remembrance of the siege and our savage enemies haunted me like a nightmare, and terror of a surprise



kept us in constant alarms until we made the broad stream of Hudson.

There was no mistaking the cheers which burst forth at sight of the city, telling how intense had been the strain upon mind and body during a long period of hardships and privations, counterbalanced by very small doses of military glory. The citizens certainly treated us like heroes, and feasted the soldiers to their hearts' content. It was pleasant to have so warm a welcome, but I confess I longed for rest, and was not sorry when the nine days' wonder came to an end and our adventures were forgotten, and myself left in peace.

My father would not return to Tuthill's Farm, for what reason I know not, so we lodged in the city with Mr. Edmiston. At first I loathed entering the house ; every room seemed to conjure up the vision of that dreadful night, and with the vision the face of brave Captain M——, pale and ghastly as I had first seen him at Fort Seneca. But habit soon rid my brain of such fancies, of all but the face which still haunted me everywhere in spite of myself, forcing back my thoughts upon every trivial circumstance, every look, every word that fell from his lips in those happy days after the siege. I never lost sight of that face ; after a while it ceased to frighten me, and appeared as a friend and protector, a guardian watching over the household to shield us from evil. Alas ! no, it was not potent enough for that. The stress of his exertions and anxiety at Fort Seneca had told severely upon my father's health ; I had noticed since our return, a waning of vigour, a loss of interest in affairs, which grieved me deeply, for he had reached an age when men's strength, once failing them, seldom returns in full measure, and I feared weakness would grow upon him with increasing years.

But suddenly, without a note of warning, the blow fell. He was struck down by illness ; the wasted frame possessed little power to rally, and I, stunned and shivering with anguish, had to witness the struggle between life and death lingering on week after week, while the hand of the destroyer was slowly gaining the victory.

Throughout his illness my father took much comfort from the ministration of Dr. Ogilvie, one of Mr. Edmiston's friends, who was a frequent visitor at the house, and well-known and respected in the city as the Rector of Trinity Church. A burly figure, a face sometimes radiant with a smile so easy and genial as to contrast sharply with the keen eyes and powerful close-set



mouth that betokened untiring energy and resolute will ; a simple-minded man whose natural large-heartedness was constantly in rebellion against the intolerant spirit fostered by his narrow views of religion ; a man who must either be loved or hated ; a staunch friend in trouble, of widest sympathies, and intense, ready self-sacrifice, but animated by relentless enmity against heresy and vice. He found in my father a fibre like his own. Both men were brave as lions ; both had been tried in the fire of adversity, and not been found wanting ; in both a character truly noble was shaded by a tinge of violence and bigotry, darkening on rare occasions into passionate outbursts, succeeded by bitter humiliation and self-reproach.

During my father's illness Dr. Ogilvie entirely devoted himself to us ; he never let a day pass without visiting us, and his presence always seemed to bring sunshine into the room, inspiring us with fresh strength to bear our sorrows bravely.

Ah me ! If human care and human love availed aught, health must surely have returned ; but God willed it otherwise, in His own good time setting the sufferer free, giving peace to the weary frame, and the calm of eternal rest.

I hardly knew what happened afterwards. Good Dr. Ogilvie arranged everything ; after the funeral he took me to live in his house, as a member of his own family. I asked no questions, I did not even thank him ; for months I went about like one in a dream, seeming not to know or care where I was, mourning for the dead. But the burden of sorrow, however cruel and crushing at first, mercifully weighs lightest on the young, and so, little by little, as I regained strength, the keen edge of grief wore off, the past slowly faded, I began to live in the present once more.

There was plenty to do at Dr. Ogilvie's ; from his eldest son of sixteen years downwards not a single member of his family was allowed to be idle. The house stood outside the city, in a large garden which gave full employment for all ; no hired labour was procured or indeed obtainable, but there was not a more productive or better cultivated spot in the neighbourhood. It was almost a farm, with its cows, pigs, and poultry, and I soon proved the value of my experience at Tuthills. Entering heart and soul into this busy life, I began to win golden opinions from the Doctor, and found at the same time the best antidote for grief, while my pride was satisfied with the thought that I was able to do something towards repaying the generosity which had given me a home in need.



## IV.

Captain M——'s image had been completely banished from my brain by the illness of my dear father, and long after his death I was so absorbed with grief that no room was left for any other emotion. But with returning health, back flew my thoughts to Fort Seneca, conjuring up once again the vision I welcomed as an old friend. Now, too, a shapeless hope took possession of me, that ere long he would come, and that somehow his coming would bring happiness. I could not explain this feeling; it was part of the mystery of the vision; but very real it was, and stronger it grew daily. I eagerly hailed every scrap of news from the fort. There had been no fresh attack by the Indians, who seemed to have become reconciled to the presence of the garrison, and were trading freely with the Agents; we had perhaps been wrong in supposing the hostility of the tribes to be general rather than due to local irritation, which had ceased with the practical extermination of the aggrieved party. Anyhow the safety of the troops was no longer imperilled, an announcement that marvellously soothed my anxiety. At length the season for sending up reliefs came round; he would soon be on his way; now he must be nearing the city; any day he might arrive. But what then? Why should he remember me? Or, if he had not quite forgotten me, he would have other things to think of, duties to attend to, friends to visit—it might be months before I should see him, nay, the chance might never occur at all. Thus I reasoned inwardly, but yet I think I was always half expectant, and not one bit surprised when he did come, just as I had hoped. The moment he entered the garden I saw him, and stood gazing at him from the window, silently admiring; then a sudden impulse seized me to rush away and hide myself. Here was what I had been longing for day and night, the meeting I had rehearsed a thousand times in fancy; but now my courage failed, shyness or silly timidity made me feel as if I would sooner sink through the earth than encounter him.

But good Dame Ogilvie, brimming over with importance at entertaining an officer of His Majesty's forces, soon discovered my retreat, and compelled me to accompany her into the parlour where he was waiting.

My head was reeling so that I could hardly walk straight into the room. As I entered, he stepped forward quickly to greet me.

"Nurse Mary, have you quite forgotten your patient?"



"Forgotten him! Good heavens, forgotten him! Every tone of his voice, every line in his features, was as familiar as if we had only parted yesterday! that bright curly hair, those clear blue eyes, the broad shoulders, the deep strong voice, had they not haunted, penetrated, absorbed me for months past? Forgotten him! I laughed aloud, the idea so tickled my fancy. Then we began to talk; soon I was perfectly at ease, conversing as freely and familiarly as ever. I am afraid Dame Ogilvie hardly got her full share of attention; before long she bounced out of the room, leaving us alone—much to my relief, for I wanted to have him all to himself. Yet a strange constraint thereupon ensued; my tongue almost refused to answer his showers of questions, about our journey from Fort Seneca, my father's illness, Dr. Ogilvie, the new home I had found, everything that had happened since he had seen me last. Worst of all was the sense of how ungrateful he must think me, for, in spite of an intense craving to open all my heart to him, the words stuck in my throat, and I behaved just like any awkward, silly girl being catechised by a stranger. What a long half hour before Dame Ogilvie returned, and he rose to take leave! he would come again, he said, when the Doctor, whose acquaintance he looked forward to making, was at home. I ran upstairs to watch till he was out of sight, straining my eyes after him down the road to the city, impatient of every tree or fence that hid him from view for a moment. Even when he disappeared in the distance, I could scarcely tear myself away from the window. My ordinary occupations palled terribly; work became drudgery, and all I could think of was the time that must pass before his coming again. The interval was not really long—only two days; but I took count in hours! He saw the Doctor that second visit, and told me he had never liked "a parson" so well. I found out afterwards that their conversation had turned on my future. Captain M——, God bless him!—had offered a share of his pay for my support, but the Doctor had stoutly refused, and then arose a contest of generosity between the two, which ended in mutual esteem, though the matter was left as it had been at first.

Captain M—— lost no opportunity of cementing their friendship. It was easy enough to gain the Doctor's good opinion, to keep it was more difficult; he credited every one with a high standard like his own, until disproved by experience; but the standard was too high for most men, and his faith in them once shaken could not be restored.



Looking back upon events, I freely pardon Dr. Ogilvie. I admit his staunch virtue, his blameless life; I grant the generous nature that wished to judge other men by himself; I can understand his disgust at finding how few stood the test; and, knowing the earnestness with which he strove after goodness, I see how he must have abhorred moral levity. So I do not wonder that he soon became shocked at M——, who was no better than his comrades, adhering strictly indeed to their own code of honour, but taking good care that none of the pastimes of gentlemen of fashion were condemned by it. But the rest of the family had no such excuse; they were good, worthy creatures, utterly ignorant of the world, and could only have seen in M—— a brave, handsome officer, who always treated them with perfect courtesy. Yet they hated him; they never dared be uncivil in his presence, but I had to listen to their miserable jeers and insults day after day. What matter to them if I *was* madly in love with him? If he did come to visit us very often, did his visits hurt them? It may be I did sometimes forget my work for thinking of him, or leave a task unfinished to join him, but what of that? What cause had they to complain, who never gave me a helping hand or lightened the least of my duties? Ah, well! I suppose they grudged me his affection, but even that they need not, for I am sure it could never have been theirs.

I was always uncertain as to when I fell in love; I liked to imagine that the spark was kindled when he rescued me from the mob on the bonfire-night; that it had been fanned while I was nursing him at Fort Seneca; but at all events it now burst into a flame so fierce and flagrant, that any single word against him sufficed to rouse me to a pitch of fury whereof I was never capable before. His visits were all I cared for; almost every day he came, feigning some excuse or other; he did not leave me long in doubt; he gave me love as fervent as my own. Oh, the joy of that heavenly secret whispered between man and maid! It was a thousand times worth the delay, the trials, the insults—that treasure beyond all price, the knowledge of love.

We began to plan out the future. Dick's pay—we were Dick and Mary now—was a mere pittance, but he had received large grants of land in Newfoundland for his bravery in the wars; settlers were arriving rapidly; he would soon sell enough to enable him to marry, and in time we should be quite rich. Dr. Ogilvie must not learn our secret yet—not until we could fix the wedding-day; for supposing him to demur—and he was a



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man whose conduct baffled calculation—he might forbid Dick's coming to the house, and condemn us to the unspeakable pangs of separation.

Meanwhile I had a talisman which banished the sting from the taunts and gibes of the family. What cared I now if Dame Ogilvie did scold me for idleness; she would not be troubled with me much longer? And if the girls did sneer at my pining for a sweetheart, had not Dick a right to all my heart? I could see they did not like his visits; but the Doctor was master in his own house, and so long as he said nothing, no one else dared raise a finger in the matter. Nevertheless, I was not quite easy in my mind, for I began to notice a certain coolness in Dr. Ogilvie's manner towards me, which I imagined must be caused by his either having discovered my secret, or regarding Dick's presence at the house with disfavour. My suspicions were soon confirmed. Calling me into the garden one day, he told me that as he was coming home from the city, he had just met Captain M—— outside the gate; that he had observed a certain degree of familiarity between us which could not be permitted. Officers in H.M.'s Service were not the right companions for young girls, and though I might not think so, he was giving me the best advice in warning me against what might easily prove a dangerous acquaintance. The abruptness of these remarks so overwhelmed me that I could find no words to answer; I ran to my room in a rage, furious with Dr. Ogilvie, and furious with myself for remaining silent. What right had he to speak ill of Dick? To know him was an honour for the family, and to me his love was life! Was it the Doctor's business to choose for me? he had no claim, no authority over my actions. Whatever might come of it,—trouble, danger, aye death itself—no power in this world or fear of the next should persuade or force me to forsake my love. Thus I raved on, until at last I cried myself tired to sleep. Next day I was calmer, but still set on disobeying advice which I knew to be meant for a command. Dick came that afternoon as usual, and out of sheer defiance, I purposely welcomed him with more warmth than usual. I paraded my intimacy before all the family, goaded by excitement into a display of reckless gaiety I was far from feeling; but the moment we were left alone it collapsed utterly, and I sank sobbing and shivering into his strong arms.

It soothed me to tell him everything; the insults I had long



borne, the Doctor's tardy apprehension, and warning against the man I loved, my resolution never to give him up, and my despair at the mere thought of separation. He had been listening silently till I spoke of parting.

"No," he cried, "by God, Mary, there shall be no parting! Mine you are, and mine you shall be, if I have to pull the house down about the parson's ears to win you!"

I liked that blunt speech which gave me the courage I wanted, and confidence to sustain the part I had chosen. We decided that until Dick was himself taxed, he should continue as if nothing had happened, and I was to meet him in defiance of the warning I had received. Perhaps the storm would blow over, but in any case we should have time to consult, if fresh threats were uttered, before they could be carried into execution.

I tried to feel brave, but my courage oozed and sank under Dame Ogilvie's cross looks at the supper-table that evening. Now that the Doctor had declared himself against Dick, the abuse of him became open and general in the household. But I think this pained me less than the covert backbiting, for my temper once fairly roused, I nailed my courage to the mast and found a malicious satisfaction in wagging as sharp a tongue as any of them. Still I was intensely miserable. Oh, why would not Dick take me away! How long must I be condemned to wait for relief from this hateful life?

Weeks passed, during which I saw him constantly—the one bright ray in my gloom—and not another word of remonstrance was uttered. But the storm was not blown over; it was gathering day by day, and I felt the crash must soon come. Dick was almost persuaded to wait no longer for the sale of his lands, about which he appeared to have been over-sanguine, and we were considering how we two could both live on his pay, barely sufficient though it was for himself alone. He would write to his brother in England who had helped him before, and might be induced to advance money or make him an allowance upon the security of the lands until they could be sold. Many were the plans we made, I assenting eagerly to the wildest scheme which promised deliverance from my prison-house. Indeed I think we should not much longer have delayed taking the final step; but events moved quicker than our plans, and when the storm broke it found us still unprepared. I was seated one evening at supper with the rest, when I heard my name gravely called by the Doctor:—



"Mary McAdam," he said—I knew what was coming—"your good father on his death-bed almost with his last words solemnly entrusted me with your welfare. I accepted the charge; God knows I tried to fulfil it faithfully! I brought you here, and made you one of my own family, to live as we live, to share, as I hoped, in our happiness. At first God's blessing seemed to rest upon us; His hand gently soothed your sorrow, and I thought that you would soon regain comfort and contentment. But since Captain M——'s return to Fort Seneca, I have been grieved to witness the change. You have become idle, wilful and sullen; you have neglected your duties, quarrelled with my children, openly disregarded the warning I gave you. I do not blame you alone for this. Captain M——, if he were a man of honour, would not have set himself to win a silly girl's heart when no good could come of it. But I know these fine soldiers; they are here to-day, gone to-morrow; they make love in every town where they are quartered, and exult over broken hearts like savages counting their scalps. You are young, Mary, and a handsome face bewitches you; I am old, and look for an honest man. I cannot forget your dead father's charge, and I will still do my utmost to save you. Since warning has no weight, I now forbid you, so long as you remain under my roof, to see or speak to Captain M——; henceforward you must choose for yourself between a home and a lover."

"The choice is soon made," I cried, starting up in a passion. "Do you think I will stay another moment in your house to be insulted like this? I am not your slave; my father sought a home for me here, not a prison. What right have you to speak ill of Dick, my friend—aye, if you prefer it, my lover? Did he not save my life? Have I not nursed him in sickness? Would I not die for him, if need were, so brave he is, so good, so true? You dare not speak to his face the words you uttered just now! I suppose you think it is safe to dishonour him before me, whose sharpest weapon is my tongue? In his name, then, I say it is a lie—a foul black lie you have uttered! Whose love has he forsaken? Whose heart has he broken? I know one that he has bound up, one he is true and loyal to, and I go to prove it. Farewell, Doctor Ogilvie; my choice is made. I go to—my lover."

Dead silence followed. Ere they had time to recover, I flung myself out of the room. Quickly I must act—quickly, before my passion cooled; away into the city to Dick's quarters, to throw myself into his arms, for the shelter denied me here. And then?



Ah! no matter what happened then; with Dick, come what might, I should be safe. Gathering up a few things, I stepped out into the night; so black, so cold it was, a shiver ran through me. Had I counted the risk? Too late to think of that now; on bravely to my darling! Half-running, half-walking, I sped along; I knew the way well, but at night it seemed strange. I was startled by every tree looming by the roadside, every sound that broke the stillness. It was full two miles into the city—enough to tire me out, wearied already with excitement, enough to turn my thoughts wistfully homewards, whither there was no returning. In the city the lights, the crowd hurrying to and fro, frightened me yet more than the silence and gloom outside. I knew not where Dick lodged; I must go to the barracks where there was a guard stationed, and ask. Wrapping my cloak closer round me, I hurried on in terror of missing my way or being accosted by some of the rough fellows who hung about the streets near the wine-shops. At length I reached the barracks. There was the sentry, slowly pacing up and down, just as I used to see him when we lived in the city. He paid no heed to me, I spoke so gently, afraid of even the sound of my own voice. I confronted him on his beat. Did he know where Captain M—— lived? Yes, thank Heaven! The house was close at hand, was visible from where we stood, so there was no mistaking it. The door was opened by an elderly woman, holding a light, cross at the disturbance.

"Is Captain M—— here?" I asked.

"What business is that of the likes of you?" was the reply, as she stepped back, intending to shut the door in my face.

That was too much. My temper rose in an instant, and I sprang forward into the house before she could act.

"Tell your master that Miss McAdam would speak with him," I said, summoning all my courage.

Something in my tone seemed to subdue her, for she made no rejoinder, but speedily retired, leaving me in darkness. This last effort quite overcame me; I sank senseless on to a bench. But soon I perceived some one standing over me, felt myself lifted up, the strong arms round me, and the voice I loved calling, "Mary! Mary!"

Dreamily I opened my eyes.

"What has happened, darling?" he said.

When he had heard my story—"You won't send me back, Dick, will you?" I asked,



"Never, darling, never!" he answered, giving me a sense of security I had not felt before. I knew what he would say, but could not rest until I heard the promise spoken. Dick vowed we should be married the next day; but I had still such a terror of Doctor Ogilvie, and fear of what might happen if he discovered me, that nothing would induce me to go to church. I know now that my fear was folly, and that he had no power at all over my actions; but I suppose the habit of obeying him was so strong, as to make me imagine all sorts of penalties for my flight if he could lay hands on me. Besides, a marriage without banns was open to be questioned, adding the risk of unlawfulness to that of discovery. Had we not already bound ourselves together by vows most sacred and by a love stronger than any oath? And was not the Church's blessing after all but a form, needless to those who had the substance? Thus, goaded by love and fear, I allowed myself, nay forced myself to take that fatal, irrevocable step which for years afterwards bore bitter fruits of misery and useless penitence. Dick was not to blame; it was I who sinned—I who rightly bore the penalty. It was not he who then refused to wed me; therefore the guilt is mine, and mine alone.

We took a cottage over the water in West Chester County; there I lived, and there you, my boys, were born. There, by years of suffering and shame, I atoned for my mad wickedness, passing under a feigned name, cut off from all my old acquaintance, suspected, shunned by the neighbours, abandoned to solitude often for weeks together, and passionately longing as time went on for those marriage vows once blindly spurned. I was yet too proud to own my penitence or crave as a favour what I had already refused as my right. Ah! that living in sin! How hideous a mockery of the happy future I had pictured! Love is mighty indeed, and on the full flood of passion rides triumphant; but when the tide ebbs, when the blood cools from fever-heat, woe, woe to man and maid who have failed to weld their love in sacred fetters, or thought to match the strength of their puny passions with the inexorable sanction of God's Holy Law! Ah! believe me, love is mighty, but it is not proof against the curse of sin.

Our love was true; but a curse lay upon it, turning happiness to gall, raising a phantom of bliss we blindly groped after yet never grasped; hurling a stab with every kiss, strangling me in an embrace of agony. When Dick was absent, I fell into a dull apathy of despair, careless even of my children: how could I take pride in them, how plan their future, whose lives I knew too



well must be for my sin's sake branded with infamy? Better they should die ere they had felt the shame, aye, better far than live and curse their mother. Yet still I loved them, loved their innocence, lived in their love for me. Surely the good God would not visit upon them my guilt! Often I resolved to speak to Dick once more of marriage, but as often failed, each effort growing weaker. Not a word had escaped his lips about it since that first night in the city. It was common enough among the officers at that time to live as we did, and considered no disgrace. I had been offered marriage and had refused; Dick had eased his conscience and was content to do like the rest. I cannot upbraid him, he was faithful and true to me through all. The sin was my own; mine too, thank God! the misery and shame.

Years passed; each day seemed a month, each month but a day; so drags out a life of sorrow, where every hour is weary, but none more than other. I never lost my fear of discovery, though all search, if ever made, must long ago have ceased. I was cut off as one dead from name, and home, and friends, and at length it seemed as if I was to lose even him for whose sake I had given up the rest.

He was taken ill in the autumn with terrible fits of sickness and the ague. A doctor said recovery was hopeless if he tried to stay in New York through the winter; we found an old neighbour to take care of the children, and I went with him by sea to Charleston, and by the aid of Providence I nursed him back to health. All the while I was ill myself, for little Peter was born on the voyage South, and it was hard work for me. Yet I think I was happier then than for many a long day past; joy at the release from the city—joy at being constantly with Dick and able to minister to him—joy at his gratitude, joy at his recovery, oh! there was a new life thrilling through me, inspiring hope, and love, and strength. But his health again gave way on our return to the city in the spring. We had a rough voyage up the coast, causing him much suffering, and reducing his power to fight the disease which was fastening upon him. For a time he resisted; but while summer was still at its height, he had to take to his bed. There he lay dying: it was no use to try to hide the truth; I watched him day and night, hardly leaving the bedside for a moment. He was so good and patient, I could feel his eyes ever following me round the room with a placid gaze of satisfied love, as I busied myself about the trifles which become absorbing in illness; but all the time there was a leaden



weight at my heart, mocking my efforts at cheerfulness, loading me with a burden harder to bear than mere pain.

This man I loved so, this dying man, was not my husband. The hope had never deserted me, flimsy though it was, that some day the cruel barrier of sin would be shattered, and our union be blessed with the Church's sanction ; but now that hope seemed lost for ever, and a future, black with despair, loomed nearer and nearer.

We had no friends among the neighbours, and rest became a thing unknown to me : even the few moments I spared from watching my darling were tormented by the appalling vision of my own wretchedness. As he grew weaker the horizon darkened ; the old doctor, after his visit one morning, said he could do nothing more : I must only wait and watch. I knew what he meant, the blow was coming soon. Terrified and dazed, as though it had fallen already, I knelt in an agony of prayer, of aimless, frantic, supplication to God to save.

A knock at the door roused me from reverie, nay, startled me at so unexpected an occurrence. I stepped cautiously to open it, and found myself face to face with—Dr. Ogilvie ! At the sight of him, my old irrational terror which had latterly subsided, again surged up. I stood there longing to double-lock the door against him, but forced to be still and listen to him.

"Mary," he said, "stay : I come to you as a friend, if you will let me. Only yesterday I heard of this grief of yours. I have come to offer you such aid as I can give. Ah ! Mary ! you do not know how my heart has ached for you ! How I have thought of you, prayed for you, watched over you ! When you left us, I made no search for you, God forgive me if I was wrong ! You had gone to the man of your choice, regardless of counsel and command ; it was too late for my entreaties to prevail, and I was powerless to compel your return. So I resolved to watch, for I could not utterly cast you off. So long as Captain M—— remained in the city, your bodily comfort would be safe, though repentance long and bitter awaited your sinful soul. I heard of his first illness, and restoration to health, and then no more, until yesterday they told me he was lying here at death's door, you nursing him. Then, Mary, I could restrain myself no longer. You must not be friendless, while I could help, or in need which I could avert. What can I do ? Let the past be forgotten between us, all but that I was your father's friend. I would still be yours, and for your sake your husband's,"



"Ah! but you do not know; he is not my husband—would to God he were!"

He had touched the keynote which disarmed all my resentment; there was no room for that in the flood of sorrow.

"Child," said he, solemnly and gently, "I dreamed not of this; yet take me to him."

The influence to obey once more seemed natural. I led the way to the chamber where Dick lay, as it chanced, asleep. Dr. Ogilvie stood by the bed-side.

"I will watch for his waking," he said, "then I will call you. Leave us now and rest yourself."

Weary and weak, I made no resistance, but flung myself on my couch and slumbered heavily for hours. Returning, I found Dick talking quietly to the doctor, who silently took his leave, saying we should see him again the next day.

"Yes," said Dick, as soon as he was gone, "to-morrow he will come back, and then, Mary, he will marry us."

What!—did I hear aright? Marry us? Was it true, or a delusion born in my whirling brain? But Dick beckoned me close to him, and told me how when he woke and perceived Dr. Ogilvie sitting there, a sudden longing desire had seized him not to die unwedded; he seemed to recognize the hand of Providence in bringing a minister of the Church to our door. The good man had hesitated, but at length yielded, influenced more by regard for my future than Dick's importunity; he had offered to dispense with the banns, to procure the King's licence, and come himself to read the service at the bedside. "So that whatever happens to me, Mary," he went on gravely, "you and the children shall face the world with a good name."

But my mind was too full of joy to contemplate so sad a thought; he would, he must recover, and we should enter upon a new life of happiness, bright as the sunshine, never to be clouded.

Alas! how short-lived were my hopes! he rallied by the contagion of my cheerfulness that evening, but the next day was worse, hardly strong enough to utter the few words of those solemn vows we plighted ere it was too late. A few hours afterwards death took him. . . .

Children, judge him not, but rather thank him that he did not allow the grave to close upon a sin to which I, your mother, had tempted.

THE END.



## TO THE RESCUE.

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OF the many houses where I have dined, Mr. and Mrs. X——'s is undoubtedly my favourite. When I think of the evenings I have spent there, I experience a sensation as nearly resembling gratitude as any a Londoner can hope to attain to. Their small dinners are always the best, of course ; but even the others have been invariably more than endurable ; and where, in their circle, or similar ones, could higher praise than that be awarded ? Chief, perhaps, among the merits of the entertainment is the absence of that feeling of oppressiveness, of that sense of the utter impossibility of ever rivalling the gorgeousness and perfection of the whole thing, which so often sends one away in a state of pained resignation to one's own insignificance. Walking home by the Park side, in the congenial company of the midnight cigar, from one of Mr. and Mrs. X——'s little dinners, I have sometimes said to myself, "Upon my word, I think *I* could give a little thing like that." An inherited want of pluck has always restrained me from the attempt to give effect to this rash resolution ; moreover, calmer reflection has since assured me that in these entertainments there is some subtle and delicate art which places them still farther beyond my reach than even the more pretentious ones to which I have alluded.

The evening of which I am about to speak, however, was, or came near to being, an exception. How the misfortune arose I have never known. To find, when I reached the house, that the affair was on the larger scale was a disappointment ; to discover, at a glance, that I was acquainted with fewer members of the company than usual, was another ; and when I saw in Mrs. X——'s eyes, as she greeted me, what I had never seen before, an indication of her being ever so little ill at ease, my spirits sank sensibly. One of the great attractions of Mrs. X——'s dinners had always been her remarkable aptitude for divining one's preference in respect to the lady who should have the power of making one happy or miserable during the two hours



or more to be spent at the dinner-table. How little do hostesses, as a rule, reflect on the awful nature of these temporary unions, inexorable, not to be severed! They resemble an unmentionable and somewhat problematic place in the fact that out of them there is no redemption. What tremendous power, as of life and death—for two hours—to be centred in one small, weak, possibly silly, woman! But Mrs. X— rose to a fine sense of her responsibilities, and rarely gave one even slight cause to complain. How often has the selection my roving eye had made during the *mauvais quart d'heure* been fulfilled in the event! How often, again, when that selection was annulled, have I had reason to thank her, and to admit that she had probably been wiser for me than I could have been for myself! Nor was I an exceptional object of her solicitude in this regard. It was the common experience of her guests; it seemed to each as though his—and I think I may also say her—predilections had alone been considered. And when, on this occasion, I found myself in the most unusual case of being ill-companioned, my spirits, already a little dashed, went down to zero; it appeared to me to be an omen of dire disaster; even my appetite seemed to flee, and my mind was filled with the dim presage of some unknown calamity.

One ray of consolation, albeit a melancholy one, there was. In a little time I found that I was apparently not expected, certainly not encouraged, to make myself particularly entertaining or agreeable. My chain, though it galled, was at least a light one; I could drag it about, and, to that extent, was free. With a mental ejaculation of thankfulness to my captor for this small mercy, I proceeded to make full use of my modified liberty. I went in search of that crumpled rose-leaf, the existence of which was to me a matter of absolute certainty. First I explored the many known faces at the table. There they were, old and tried comrades, brothers and sisters in arms; many a knife and fork had we brandished side by side; and in none of their faces could I now read the danger signal. X— himself seemed the same as ever; but in his wife's face, and through her smiles, I could still see the same watchful, anxious expression that had surprised me on entering. With a sigh, as I thought of the hopeless nature of the quest, I set out for the strange regions.

"I shall be away some time," I thought; "let me make one farewell remark to the lady who for the present has dominion over my being."

The harmless courtesies were exchanged, and I started. The



new faces stood out like unknown islands that had suddenly sprung up in familiar waters. One rapid survey first, the only result of which was that I had counted them. Eight in all; five women, including my liege lady, and three men. Now to classify them; two young men, ordinary, to all appearance; one elderly, military; typical, safe. "Can it be a lady?" I thought; "then indeed my chances of making a discovery are slender." I know that charming sex well enough to have abandoned the idea that I can make a good first-sight diagnosis of any member of it. My eyes rested on one of them after the other, in a manner quite aimless and futile. After the expenditure of full three minutes, I was still unenlightened. Back I came to my duty, dropped a conversational pearl, received another in exchange, and was off again. Like the children, both of a smaller and a larger growth, I said: "I will take the easiest thing first. I will exhaust the possibilities of the male unknowns." Here at least I was in a field of research for which Providence has not altogether denied me the capabilities.

The next remark made to me by my fair neighbour received the quite irrelevant answer: "Yes. I have found him." My apology was received with perfect calmness and good humour; the little incident helped, in fact, to break down the barrier that had stood between us. We conversed somewhat more freely; but hardly for a moment did I remove my eyes from the object of intense interest they had discovered. A young man, of not more than thirty, almost opposite to me, was conversing in a low voice and rapidly with a girl, also one of the unknowns. He would have been handsome, but for a certain expression in his face that made one say, in the first place, "Weakness." On looking again and again, and more and more keenly, I mentally added, "Dissipation." The contrast between the upper and lower portions of his face was very marked, the mouth and chin expressing irresolution and self-indulgence with fatal clearness, while the forehead and eyes maintained a calm, almost haughty, nobility. It was as though one saw the high-water mark of the muddy waves of life on what must have been at one time an unsullied and almost perfect face; and the question, "When, where, and how did he begin to cease to be a gentleman?" irresistibly assailed my mind. But when he laughed, his whole face seemed to share what I cannot but call the degradation of the lower part; and he laughed frequently. More and more frequently, I remarked, as dinner went on. His conversation, of



whatever nature it might be, seemed to interest, amuse, and even excite his companion. Of her I could not bring myself to formulate any more definite judgment than was summed up in the one word, "Frivolous." True, she was young, very young; but one somehow felt that the frivolity would remain, when it would be no longer possible to plead the excuse of youth. As I watched them, I seemed, as one sometimes does, without hearing a word to gather vaguely the import of their talk, which was chiefly on his side; her *rôle*, apparently, being, half-shyly, half-maliciously, to encourage him to further sallies. A gradual, but to me at least fearfully distinct, crescendo all at once began to set in, and now I caught a word or two, a phrase or two, here and there. I glanced at my hostess. The shade of anxiety on her face had deepened into alarm. Again I looked at my *vis-à-vis*, and a horrible thought came over me. Certainly, while I had observed him, he had drunk wine in the ordinary way, but I had not thought that he did so too freely; and yet, undoubtedly he was just a little intoxicated. Hastily I looked round the table to see whether any one else appeared to notice it; the conversation had become brisker and more general; my companion was talking to her other neighbour. At this time dessert was about to begin. "We shall get through," I thought; "besides, I have been over-observant of him; I exaggerate; I have worked myself up to an undue pitch of sensitiveness." Again the crescendo, and this time it seemed that he *must* attract attention. No! not yet! I began to catch from his conversation more than detached words and phrases. And now my worst fears were realized. He was speaking in a manner—how shall I describe it?—well, in a manner which, to say the least, would have better befitted the period, a little later, when our sex would be in undisputed possession of the dining-room. Higher and higher his voice rose; the girl's face now expressing sheer fright at the spirit she had helped to evoke. One or two groups near him broke off their conversation in a startled manner. I saw Mr. and Mrs. X—exchanging mute piteous signals of distress. What was to be done? Without exciting remark, our hostess could not for at least fifteen or twenty minutes give the signal for the ladies to depart. For an instant I caught her eye, and read in it a wild despairing appeal for help. Half a minute more, and the entire situation must have been plain to everybody. The table was already beginning to be stirred with a sense of something unusual. I rapidly breathed what I suppose was a prayer,



braced myself for an effort, and addressed my *vis-à-vis* in loud firm tones: "Pardon me, sir, but what you say reminds me——"

"I am speaking to this lady, sir,"—his manner was quite courteous—"and really must——"

"If you will kindly allow me," I said, very politely, but with an endeavour to introduce a considerable amount of resolution into my tone; "what you say brings to my mind so vividly an incident that once happened to me, that I cannot refrain from relating it. You will find it worth listening to, I imagine."

Disregarding a movement of impatience on the part of some of the gentlemen, with whose dislike for anecdote I would, under other circumstances, have been in perfect sympathy, I went on:

"Some years ago——"

Here a gesture of despair from all the gentlemen, and a half-suppressed groan from one or two; while, among the ladies, a rustle of pleased anticipation. I proceeded relentlessly:—

"Some years ago, when barely twenty, I was returning from the Cape, whither I had been sent in search of health. We had a pleasant company on board, composed of strangely varied elements, which yet seemed happily chosen for blending into the most perfect harmony and good-fellowship. Among the more noticeable of the passengers was a lady, whose age might have been anything from twenty-two to twenty-seven; intelligent, artistic, handsome; married, but whether wife or widow none of us, I think, knew. In the crowd of gay and good-humoured people who helped to charm away the monotony of the voyage she might well have been awarded the first place; and our pleasant evenings in the saloon were indebted to her for much of their success. If one had to find a fault in her, it would perhaps have been that she was a little too brilliant; bright and sparkling rather than amiable or tender; that her cleverness was a trifle tinged with sarcasm; and that, altogether, one's predominant feeling in regard to her was admiration rather than liking. But it seems ungracious to cavil at the very qualities which made her pre-eminently good company, and so laid us all under a deep obligation. I was at that dreamy age when our powers, or habits, of observation are fitful and erratic; when we fail to notice the nine-and-ninety things that are perfectly obvious, and are keenly alive to the hundredth, which no one would ever have expected us to see. It was my whim to be interested in her; and in the intervals when I was not watching the receding Southern Cross, or wondering how many things there were in heaven and earth



yet undreamt of in my philosophy, I had the impertinence to speculate about her to a considerable extent. And the first result of my speculation was that I persuaded myself that I detected a forced note in her gaiety. She sang, and sang well ; but it was strange how persistently she avoided those tender songs I would have preferred to hear, and gave us, for the most part, songs that mocked at life, or wild gipsy melodies ringing with defiance, and full of passion too fierce to be called by the gentle name of love. The "Habanera" of "Carmen," then comparatively new, was perhaps her favourite ; and she certainly sang it in a manner that ought to have been convincing, that would have convinced any but a very young man obstinately bent on maintaining his theory. And my theory, of course, was of a woman bearing about with her a deeply hidden sorrow, a woman of intense tenderness masquerading as heartless, fearful of revealing anything, lest she should reveal too much. I began to court her society, and you may imagine that in the course of many walks on deck I was able to manufacture a good deal of evidence to corroborate my theory."

During all this I could see the face of my friend opposite fixed on mine with painfully strained attention, and an earnest determination not to fail to discover in what the precise appositeness of my story might consist.

"I say that I manufactured evidence, for really there was none. Our conversation was always of the most ordinary character, and, so far as it went, perfectly frank and friendly. I was not in love with her—not in the least ; considering the circumstances, and the fact that I was twenty, and she some few years older, I have since regarded it as a most marvellous thing that I was not ; but I suppose my intense intellectual interest in her, not to call it by the vulgar name of curiosity, engrossed me completely. Always I was watching for the revelation of her inner, deeper self ; and it never came. Once, I remember, we were crossing, as we had often crossed before, a sort of bridge between two decks. Beneath we could see right down into the ship's hold, a depth that seemed at times quite fearful. This evening she paused awhile, looked down, shuddered slightly, and passed on. I always regarded that little action as symbolical of our intercourse. We kept strictly to the level upper walks of the conventionalities and mediocrities. What dreadful cargo she carried, if any, I was never privileged to know. She always seemed to me to—well, to shudder and pass on.



"Did I say that my theory found absolutely no evidence to support it? I was wrong. There was just one trifle, light as air, if you will. I have said that her songs were of the wild, fierce, defiant, mocking kind. But sometimes in the pauses of our conversation—for we had grown to be on sufficiently good terms to sustain even long pauses without awkwardness—I have heard her gently humming to herself, and fancied, or rather not merely fancied, that I caught the tenderer note; now a bar or two of Beethoven, now a song of Schumann, or a snatch of Elsa's music in 'Lohengrin'; and, more often still, some simple old Scotch melody—'Ye banks and braes,' I *know* I have heard, and 'Auld Robin Gray'——"

Here a lady at the other end of the table suddenly dropped her fruit-knife, with a little exclamation.

"I fear I weary you," I said.

"No, no! Quite the reverse. Go on, *please*"—with much emphasis.

"Well, a couple of nights before we reached Madeira I dreamed of her, a dream that I know was vivid at the time, yet in the remembrance became provokingly indistinct. Out of it came to me but one idea, but that stood forth with startling, irresistible force. Through the dream, and afterwards with increasing persistence, I was haunted by the question: 'Will there be a letter for her at Madeira?' It was borne in upon me, in a manner not to be withstood, that issues of the very gravest nature were hanging upon the answer to this question. It filled my mind to an extent quite absurd and incredible. I longed to speak to her about it; yet the very same reason rendered it impossible that I should do so. It was easy, you will say, to address to her some such words as these: 'You, I suppose, like the rest of us, expect news at Madeira?' How many times such words were on the tip of my tongue! But the more strongly I was impelled to speak them, the more strongly I felt that the speaking of them would be an unwarrantable liberty, a presumptuous request for a confidence that could be nothing short of sacred. While my mind was still tortured by this ever-increasing curiosity, we reached Madeira.

"A trivial, but still quite compelling, circumstance occurred there to prevent my learning what I wished to know; and until we had left the island I neither saw nor heard anything of my friend. That no letter had come on board for her I afterwards ascertained; but she had gone on shore, and of her movements



while there no one seemed to have any knowledge. A few hours after we had started, I saw her for a moment at the door of her room, and one glance at her face was sufficient to tell me that, whatever the answer to my dream-question, the result for her had not been happy. All the gaiety, real or assumed, was gone now, and in its stead there was such an expression of agony and hopelessness as I trust I shall never see again on the face of any human being. It was not a tear-stained face that I saw there—had it been so, it would have been infinitely less sad. There was in it only a rigid stony despair that told me clearly that consolation would be in vain. Not that I had time to think of offering any, for the meeting was but momentary. She shut her door instantly, without one word or glance of recognition. She did not appear at dinner, and all that evening I paced the deck alone, hoping, though hardly expecting, that she would come to join me. The saloon was quiet and unmusical that night; she had been so largely the life and soul of it that her absence caused a blank that no one seemed to have the heart to try to fill. Once I ventured near her door, with an insane idea of knocking, and proffering my help in I know not what way, or asking her whether she would care to walk on deck, or something. Of course my courage failed me, as I had known it would, and I only lingered near her door for some time, listening, I am ashamed to say, to her movements. She seemed as though engaged in packing up, or putting things in order; I heard her opening and shutting drawers, and now and again she paced the small room with firm and regular tread.

“That night I hardly slept for thinking of her; but I will confess, to my shame, that my haunting idea was not so much one of solicitude for her, though that was present too, but rather the same intense curiosity that had been with me for three days, the question now being: ‘Had she, or had she not, received a letter at Madeira?’ Towards daylight I went to sleep, and slept fitfully, with this question still ringing in my ears.

“My curiosity on that point was never satisfied, for next morning she was nowhere to be found.”

“And what was the explanation?” somebody asked.

“There could be but one explanation,” I replied. “The idea of murder was not, I think, suggested by anybody. For my part, I would not have entertained it for a moment. Save only the nature of her trouble, everything seemed clear to me. Strangely enough, the affair caused no stir here after we arrived. I really



don't know that it ever found its way into the papers."—

How sad!"—"How interesting!"—"How romantic!"—"How mysterious!"—"How unsatisfactory!"

And, amid a rustling of silks, and these half-pleased, half-awed feminine murmurs, to which the male element listened in scornful silence, Mrs. X—— and the ladies left the room. Some good Samaritan took charge of my opposite neighbour, and disposed of him somehow or other. I have never seen him since; and what was the nature of his connexion with the X——'s, or how he came to be their guest on this, so far as I know, solitary occasion, I have never learnt.

As we were turning our chairs sideways, in the new-found delight of elbow-room, stretching our cramped limbs, and going as near to yawning as good breeding will permit, young Talbot Sprake said to me:

"I say, old man, isn't it a little dangerous to indulge in a long story like that? Aren't you afraid of boring people?"

"My dear boy," I said, "if it bored you to listen to it, what do you suppose must have been the sufferings of the poor wretch who had to tell it?"

"Oh, I say! Really? So sorry! By Jove, I always thought you fellows enjoyed telling them! Have a cigarette?"

On our arrival in the drawing-room, Mrs. X——, who, beyond all women I know, has a sensitive and grateful appreciation, said to me: "Mr. ——, have I shown you my husband's latest folly in etchings?"

So we went to a remote corner of the room, and Mrs. X—— said: "I don't think any one can see us here. I want to shake your hand, and I really can't wait until you're going away."

A few minutes afterwards Mrs. X—— introduced me (by special request, as I divined at the time) to a lady. It was the lady who had been guilty of a small, a very small, interruption in the course of my narrative.

"Oh, Mr. ——, I was *so* interested in that story you told in the dining-room!"

Here was an evidently sincere compliment to my narrative powers. "Indeed?"—"Yes. The fact is, I knew the lady."

"You knew her?" I queried, in a tone, I fear, of unbelief.

"Well, no; not exactly; that is, I had never met her, but I knew her people very well, very well indeed."—"Really?"

"Just fancy your being on the same ship, and knowing her so intimately! How small the world is!"—"Is it not?"



"Of course you were not quite accurate when you said that the account had not got into the papers. It did, you know, a little ; but her people were very influential, and hushed it up to a great extent. How remarkable that dream of yours was !"

"Very remarkable."

"I wonder what that letter she got at Madeira—or rather, as you say, I wonder whether she did get one!"—"I wonder!"

"How interesting it all is! Do you know, it's very strange, but I have never before come across any one who had travelled by that ship."

"How large the world is!" I suggested.

"Is it not? And what you said about 'Auld Robin Gray'—by the way, I hope my foolishness didn't disconcert you."

"Not at all."

"I was startled for the moment. Of course at the very beginning I thought of her, but when you mentioned 'Auld Robin Gray,' I knew it *must* be she. You know, there *was* something of that sort in it."—"Really!"

"Well, more or less like it. But come, Mr. —, of course you know all this quite as well as I do. I can see very plainly that you didn't tell the whole story downstairs."

"Upon my word, I don't know a single thing more than I have told you."

"Nonsense! nonsense! Of course I respect your motive for saying so, but you surely don't expect me to—— Now, Mr. —, if I were to tell you all I know, and you were to tell me all you know, between us we might easily be able to clear up the whole affair. There's a great deal of mystery in it, I assure you ; nobody quite understands it yet."

"I am afraid I shall not be able to help you."

"Come, come, Mr. —, you really are very unreasonable. Why, it seems as if Providence had thrown us together for the very purpose! Your having been on board, my meeting you here to-night, your happening to tell the story——"

"I admit," I said, "I quite admit that the coincidence is very strange."—"Is it not?"

"But, to my mind, the most extraordinary part of the whole thing is——"—"Yes?"

"Is the fact that I have never been to the Cape in my life, and that, until I told her tragic story this evening, I had never seen or heard of the lady!"

W. B. TARPEY.

3 M 2



## WOMEN OF NAPLES.

BY CONSTANCE EAGLESTONE,

AUTHOR OF "THE SIEGE OF CONSTANTINOPLE," &c.



THE woman of the upper class in Southern Italy may be described as a brilliant humming-bird, whose irresponsible existence is passed in flashing her own bright hues in the sun. To her sisters of the lower orders the lot of the hewers of wood and drawers of water has been given. In the city which has claimed for its own peculiar use the name of Beautiful, labour is more equally distributed, but in the districts around—in Capri above all—whatever burden is heaviest and task most distasteful, is handed over to those who are least able to bear it, and one constantly inclines to exclaim with a young naval officer here the other day: "I don't know how these Italians can *live* under the disgrace of seeing their women slave as they do!"

In studying woman, however, one of the earliest things to be learnt is that she never really needs pity unless she is unhappy, and that, judging from appearances, the lower-class maidens and mothers of Il Regno, as they still call Naples, are not. Life cannot be taken as easily now as it was twenty years ago, before the Sardinian Occupation, when every one who was not a beggar-supporter was a beggar, and few, unless they so inclined, must work before they might eat; yet the women round about the Bay, and those who are scattered over the vine-clad hills of the interior, are tall and straight, and bright and comely as ever.

The following is the simple history of a day of thousands who live in the little "cities," which gem the curving shores of the southern half of this peninsula. Carmela rises while it is still almost night, ties a brightly coloured kerchief over her fresh white blouse and dark petticoat, and places a thick pad, the badge of her trade, on her black curly hair, which was brushed



out and plaited up a week ago, and will need no further attention for some time to come. Then she cautions her little son to be punctual at school, and not keep the good priest waiting. If he be a boy of any spirit, however, she knows he will not dream of obeying her, but will run down to the Marina, and spend the day in gnawing cast-away melons, plunging into the sea, and demanding *una bottiglia* for imaginary services from every passing stranger. His sister, quite oblivious of the fact that she is bearing a very fair proportion of the Wrongs of Woman on her little brown brow, cheerfully follows her mother, for she is ten years old to-day, so is forthwith to be instructed in her profession—that of a beast of burden.

A new wing is to be added to an hotel, an embankment to be extended to enclose another acre of a vineyard, or a breakwater to be carried fifty yards further out to sea, and as the men are all fully occupied in puddling up lime to make cement, in turning the handle of a construction for raising small blocks of stone singly—that very machine which Romulus invented when he began to pile up his wall—and in laying the light hollow bricks one on the other, it is necessary that Carmela and her little girl should help the other women to begin the real work of the day; that is, to go down to the water's brink, pick up the blocks of stone thrown down there out of the barge, and carry them up the steep slope to the point where the additional wing was being spread.

Carmela carefully places the pad she has prepared on her child's shining hair, then selects a large flat stone, and puts it on the top; being a practical geologist she knew at a glance which was the lightest of those strewn about; and understanding thoroughly the law of balance, she was aware that a large stone would be less likely than a small one to slip from its place and paint a black bruise on her little one's shoulder or instep. That done, she straightens her shoulders, bids her hold her head well up, plant her little foot firm, and let her arms swing loose from her side; then sends her off up the hill, snatching up the nearest of the big boulders, and raises it hastily up to her own pad that she may follow her little girl to see that no careless pedestrian runs up against her, causing the unaccustomed burden to quiver or fall.

Up and down the hill, till their shapely shoulders must ache and their laden brows throb with pain and fatigue, the mother and her child pass, while the sun beats fiercely down upon them,



and the hot pavement which they tread blisters their brown feet. There can be no scamping of work, for an Argus-eyed inspector sits to watch it, and would have much to say if an attempt were made to slip away with fewer than the full tale of bricks. However, his task is no difficult one, and, fortunate man, he is never made to feel a tyrant, as however strict and stern his orders be, these sunny-natured women always obey them with a smile.

At noon an hour of grace is usually given, and then Carmela and her little daughter sit down in the shade, the latter forgetting her weariness in her triumph at having made her *début* and being proclaimed to the world as a grown-up woman of ten. They now for the first time that day break their fast and feast on a crust of sour bread and a slice of a water-melon. This meal will be repeated at eight o'clock, just before they go to bed ; but if Carmela's husband were not a prosperous and industrious man, she, as is the case with most of her neighbours, would eat once in the day only. Try to think what that means : to rise at dawn ; to go out unrefreshed, even by a cup of milk ; to pursue an occupation making heavy demands on physical vigour ; not to return home till dusk, and then to propitiate nature with a little fruit and bread, or, in moments of wild extravagance, a dish of macaroni. Truly air and sunshine are more sustaining in Southern Italy than elsewhere.

As they lean back against the tufa wall, the Italian tongue, more silent here when owned by a woman than a man, is loosened, and the stiffened fingers, released from their toil, fly abroad as they help on the conversation which concerns the *Festa* to-morrow, when the mother means to buy a bright yellow kerchief to twist round her dusky locks, and a gingerbread cake in the form of an anchor, its coil of rope marked in white sugar, for the little work-woman beside her.

These *Festas* form the chief pleasure of the Neapolitans, young and old, and will keep them wandering about the little Marina in delighted groups till midnight. They usually take place on Sunday, being mostly connected with the services of the Church ; but one is occasionally kept on some week-day, thus consoling the workers for the want of a Saturday afternoon holiday, which is not recognized here. It should have been mentioned while dawn was still young, that before beginning the labour of the day, the mother and child had entered the little church, sprinkled holy water on their brows, and knelt for a few minutes at the steps of the altar. Superstition and ignorance



cling close to the simple untaught women of Southern Italy, it is true, but hovering above them is the spirit of true religion, childlike, trustful and sincere, and its gentle teaching, along with much which might be well put aside, includes some honest practical ideas of duty to oneself and one's neighbour.

The nightmare of the lower classes is the terribly excessive and oppressive taxation. Their wages are pitifully small, and few as are their natural needs, and fewer as they compel them to be, they cannot meet the demands made upon them. Far and wide that divining rod which resolves to evoke something out of nothing reaches, and taxation is almost reduced to the level of an absurdity; poultry, it is said, are to come under the ban next, and the peasants who have earned a few soldi by selling an occasional egg to their richer neighbours, must now hide away their chickens in the cellar, and tie up the bill of the crowing chanticleer with an end of coloured twine for fear they should call down a visit from the Syndic.

*Così si fa* when a nation is bent on being great.

Let us return to the little home which Carmela left before dawn. It consists of a single room, and this is shared between her own family and that of Serafina her sister. As they are prosperous they can afford a window and a balcony, the latter counting almost as a second room. Two or three households established above, have no light or air excepting that which is supplied through a small unglazed hole in the wall, usually stopped up with tufa-bricks. And yet they live!

Serafina is a fruit-sorter by trade, but as she has various calls upon her before going up to the lemon-groves, she rises first of the family. First she must bring in water. This is done in a primitive fashion by stepping out on to the balcony, and letting down a pail into the round stone well in the court beneath. Until a short time ago, one of the daily occupations was to carry up salt water. Now a tax is laid on the sea. If Serafina wish, she may carry up a little pitcher of Neptune's great gift in her hand, but nothing out of which she might extract a few grains of salt for her mess of macaroni and tomatoes. A string of the latter are hung up on the balcony to dry, and below is an earthen pot containing a root of the same, to which she gives a few drops of water as she swings in her pail.

That done, she takes in her hand a little cresset of oil and some flowers picked the night before, for she is going up the hill and will pass a strip of vineyard which used to belong to her father,



and these are votive offerings to be laid at the shrine of the Virgin who protects the vines and olives. It is a neat little recess, and the Holy Image is marked out on porcelain tiles and protected by a sheet of glass and frame of sculptured stone. One of these stands at the corner of each vineyard and every turn of the road, and none is without a tender reverent handmaid to do it honour. A couple of fox-coloured dogs rush frantically out barking loudly as she enters the iron gateway, but fawn upon her as they recognize her voice. They are the guardians of the vineyard, and most effectually secure the safety of the purple clusters above their heads.

As Serafina leaves the plot of high raised ground, a subtle change comes over her. She steps cautiously as though afraid of being overheard, and looks guiltily round. She has no designs on the grapes, it is clear, and as she has a husband and children at home, cannot be stealing to meet a lover under a trysting-tree. Moreover, the trysting-tree is not of Neapolitan growth.

This is her case. Her brother Antonio—most men down here are named Antonio, the rest are called Antonino—has been employed through the summer on board a yacht belonging to one of the visitors at the big hotel where her sister works. Two nights ago as he was cooking his supper in the little vessel, he upset a kettle of boiling water, severely scalding his toes. He promptly thrust his feet into the sea to effect a cure, and consequently, poor fellow, suffered greatly all night. In the morning his kind patron, hearing of the misfortune, arranged for him to be received and treated at the hospital of the village.

In fear and trembling Antonio repaired thither, for a Neapolitan knows better than to trust nurses and doctors. However, the padrone had ordered and he must obey, though doubtless he would be subjected to cholera or to dissection before morning.

His courage held out for three hours, during which he took off his bandages seven times to show his fellow-patients how his toes were going on. Then he looked down from the hospital balcony where he had been placed to take the air, and saw that the gate into the court-yard stood ajar. Now was his time—not a moment was to be lost, he must fly.

He stole softly downstairs. Twice he had to go back thinking he saw the shadow of some nurse in the distance. Once he took refuge in the chamber of a bed-ridden old man, who nodded



sympathetically and wished him good-luck. He would not stand in the path of a poor patient with scalded toes, fleeing away on his heels for his life.

So by dint of doubling and crouching, and hiding in friendly corners, Antonio escaped, and got up on to the hill, where he spent the night, after sending a message to his mother to come and find him there with food in the morning.

The two consulted darkly together, and then thought it would be wise to change his place of concealment and go up higher, near where the quail-nets were hung on Grande St. Angelo. The hospital authorities would not take the trouble to seek him so far away, and in a day or two the evasion would be forgotten, and he could return to his work on the quay.

Serafina now turned away, having first made an interested inspection of the toes, and struck off to the lemon-groves of her employer.

A reprimand for being late met her ; but as she was the strongest woman in this part of the country, and showed her white teeth in a very sweet and deprecating smile, the lecture was not long. Then she bent her shapely shoulders, and nearly a hundredweight of the lovely, delicately-tinted fruit, piled high in its basket of cane, was lifted on to the pad on her head. Thus laden, she set off down the hill, moving with a firm elastic step at a quick swinging trot, in company with half-a-dozen others. At the end of a mile they pause a moment to rest, but converse curiously little. The women in the country round the Bay talk little ; their work is hard and their subjects are few.

The momentary rest over, the women make their way down to the sorting-room near the quay, where the grand work of separating good and bad takes place. A large lemon-boat is waiting in the harbour to sail away at sunset, and the trader is most strict in his proving of the fruit. He has some hundreds of light wooden cases on board, some of which have been filled under the trees of the fragrant grove, others prepared down here by Serafina and her companions. He opens one of these at random, and if a single damaged fruit is found within, he would refuse the whole cargo.

The hours of the *Festa* next day are not spent in idleness. Building and fruit-sorting are suspended, but knitting-needles click busily, for every one round Naples knows how to twist silk and thread into socks or wraps, and each little maid as she runs out of school gathers up a handful of slender curved bows of



steel, which she curls round her web to good purpose, though in a manner strange to unaccustomed eyes.

Nets, too, have to be prepared for the fishers in the harbour, and, most graceful of implements, the spinning-wheel of Margaret is seen in door and window, its soft silky mesh gleaming softly as it passes through the lithe brown fingers of a representative of one of the handsomest, strongest, most industrious, most virtuous, and, despite the manifold hardships which assail her, most contented women of the South of Europe.

The Neapolitan women of the middle classes are less pleasant for the writer to portray than those either above or below them. The energy and cheerfulness of the one and the art-of-doing-nothing gracefully of the other are at once denied them. And, gravest charge of all, their beauty and comeliness are reserved for display before the outer world, while disorder and slovenliness of the most exaggerated description are the rule at home.

*Cherchez l'homme* usually holds good when you seek the cause of a woman's fault, and in this point the Neapolitan male is not free from blame. He is inordinately proud of his wife and daughter when he takes them out in all the glories of silk and lace for a drive on Sunday afternoon, or to swell the crowd round the Cathedral of S. Januarius when the miraele of the liquefaction of the blood of that favourite Neapolitan saint takes place; but he appears to be entirely indifferent to their charms under his own roof, where, from the fact of work and play alike leading him abroad, he spends but little time.

However, as unmixed condemnation is neither pleasant to utter nor to hear, and none else here seems practicable, this branch of the subject shall be set aside.

A Neapolitan woman of the upper classes can smile sweetly, dance lightly, coquet gracefully, dress daintily. There her powers for the most part end. To blister her soft palm with an oar, to prick her taper fingers with a needle, broaden her slender foot by walking, or draw lines across her smooth brow by study, are proceedings so exceedingly foolish that she wonders even foreigners care to go in for them. Art is impossible for her. No amateur can practise under the eye of the painter-monarchs of her native land, and in music she prefers to make use of her correct ears and innate appreciation as a listener, rather than as an interpreter. Were it otherwise, what instrument could she play? The mandoline and the guitar savour too much of the people; the piano is a foreign importation; the violin is never



really at home unless touched by the loving hand of a Teuton or Hungarian, and when the silver trumpets with their syren tubes are drawn out of the cotton-wool in which they are kept at the Vatican, artists must be summoned from Paris before their sweet sounds can be wooed forth.

Orchestral and operatic music is all that Italians really care for, and as they very wisely decline, as a rule, to admit these as "chamber music," instrumental melody is rarely heard in private houses.

In her infancy the tiny Neapolitan is frequently tended by an English nurse, and the influence of the latter will probably extend to throwing the swaddling-bands out of the window, and introducing a wholesome diet of bread and milk in place of fruit and wine ; but she will not be able to divest her nursling of her blue silk shoes and white lace frock, and send her out to make mud pies in a serge smock, nor will she be able to throw down the wall which divides the establishment of the little *ragazza* from that of the *ragazzo*, her brother, who even in his earliest years works and plays at different hours and in different localities from her. The result of this is a curious mutual indifference between children of the same family, very unlike the devotion varied by pull-hair fights of the boys and girls of an English play-room.

While in the nursery, the little Italian shows her immense superiority at least in one way to the maiden of the north, for she learns to chatter fluently in at least four languages.

"English is so hard," confessed a young Italian, aged seven, the other day. "French and German, and Neapolitan and Italian, that is all very well, but we don't know how to make English."

A girl of the upper class is rarely educated at home ; in some cases she will be sent to Rome, or even to Paris, to be brought up at the *Sacré Cœur* : if so, she will probably not see her parents half-a-dozen times between the age of ten and sixteen, and her brothers and other relatives not at all. Convent life is very quiet and monotonous, but the firm, yet gentle sway of the nuns is not disliked. Occasionally the influence of some little black sheep will disturb the general tranquillity, promote inclinations to peep over the garden-wall, and to pinch the point of a rival's little finger ; but, as a rule, the soothing atmosphere is found very congenial, and most girls declare that having obeyed parental wishes, and glanced at the world and mankind, they will return



and take the veil. If an Italian woman have several daughters, she usually prefers to leave one to the Church. There is something restful to her in the thought that one at least of her little brood is placed where peace and freedom from care can hardly fail to be secure. Most family portrait-galleries here include a reserved cabinet for representations of such cloistered sisters of the house.

There are naturally some brilliant exceptions to the statement that the women of Southern Italy are merely sunshine-loving butterflies, but its general accuracy cannot be disputed. Even in Rome the cultivation of the female intellect has not been raised to the level of one of the fine arts, though there Queen Margarethe takes a noble lead.

*Nostra graziosa Regina*, as her loyal subjects like to call her, beguiles her idle hours with the 'Nineteenth Century' and the 'Revue des Deux Mondes.' She plays and sings beautifully, and encourages by her frequent presence at their concerts the musicians of Rome, whether foreigners or natives. She superintended personally the education of her only child, the Prince of Naples. She is most generous in her charities, and among her various good qualities is that of being an indefatigable walker and mountaineer.

To return to the Neapolitan Signorina whom we left in her convent : at sixteen she returns to her half-forgotten home ; her flat-soled, little convent-shoes are changed for French boots with points tapering into space, and heels which add two inches to the stature of her seclusion-days. Her good points and bad are carefully catalogued, and her style is decided on ; then her chamber-woman and dressmaker are bidden to consider her as their own, while the mother—the Neapolitans walk very well—glides down to consult with the family-confessor about her marriage.

In this direction the priest is still and will probably remain omnipotent. It is a point which Signor Bonghi and his Law-of-Guarantees do not touch. No strained idea of delicacy prevents the *padre* from inquiring into the condition of the Signorina's health, temper, and finance. He has always a fair number of candidates for marriage on his hands, and is honestly prepared to do his best for both parties. If he can assure the mother that the would-be bridegroom does not gamble, and that the charges on his estate do not prevent him deriving a fair income from it, she will feel she is doing well by her child, and will authorize the priest to call on the young man's parents and commence



negotiations at once. Further north, girls are frequently allowed to go into society three or four years after leaving school before any pressure is put on them to settle down; south of Rome this is rarely the case. To the credit of modern society, be it said, attempts to link crabbed age and buoyant youth together are few. The period between the first meeting of the young couple and the celebration of the marriage is very short, and it is unnecessary to state that here, as elsewhere in Southern Europe, the girl never sees her *fiancé* out of her mother's presence. If they meet in society, the young man may stand for a moment over his Signorina's chair, but it is generally the mother who answers his remarks, and if he lead her away to dance, he brings her back after a turn or two, which have perhaps been made in total silence.

From the above reasons, as will be supposed, marriages between Englishmen and Italian girls are almost unknown. Although our countrymen are quite ready to treat their future mother with a great deal of chivalrous deference, they would resent very much indeed finding that she elected to monopolise all their conversation, and looked severe if stray glances from the young lady's heavily-fringed dark eyes were demurely turned in any direction but that of the black and white tiles which form a Neapolitan floor. Moreover, unless the islander chances to be a diplomatist, it is hardly within the bounds of possibility that he should understand any language but his own, and his Neapolitan charmer probably finds it difficult in the earlier stages of her acquaintance to "make English" with sufficient facility to keep him with her for long—in a crowd, that is.

An Italian male, on the contrary, is frequently found to be the possessor of an English or an American wife. Transatlantic women have a remarkable power of fitting themselves deftly into any hole, round or square, where fortune or inclination may have chanced to cast them. That is not often the case with English maidens, and it must be frankly confessed these mixed marriages, especially in the south of the peninsula, are usually failures. The principal reasons for this are obvious, and it would be both unfair and unnecessary to recapitulate them. The following brief statements may serve to prove how entirely the usual occupations of an English lady are blotted out if she marry an Italian. No one here looks after her own household, and any attempt to do so would be foredoomed. There is no country-house life as with us, and no rector's wife to whom to lend kindly



aid in looking after the tenants or the poor. The daughters are educated in some distant convent, and the sons probably at the Jesuits' College. All marry early, so their mother enjoys little intercourse with them. The husband could hardly by the most remote possibility be induced to look on domestic life, as we understand it, as either comprehensible or desirable. A woman who reads would be shunned as a bore, and one who did not care to sit for half the day with a cigarette between her lips would be considered a terrible damper—and very rightly so, perhaps, by those who did incline so to sit. Finally politics, a resource of many who are ambitious, or who soar above dress and dance, are a closed subject. The "Makers of Italy" are hardly even names to the wife of the nobleman south of the Tiber. The glories of the ancient empire, the triumphs of mediæval art, the brilliant page which records the successes of to-day, are nothing to her. Naples is still *Il Regno*, and the exiled Bourbon a Bonnie Prince Charlie who may yet re-establish a pleasure-loving independent court on the shores of the Blue Bay, and scatter confusion in the ranks of the Sardinian stranger who in some inexplicable way has imposed his rule upon her.





## PLATES OR BAGS?

BY R. G. SOANS.



## CHAPTER I.

THE Rev. John Smith, vicar of Hillsford, and the Rev. Reginald Brown, curate of Billsford, were bitter enemies. The Rev. John Smith was High Church, and the Rev. Reginald Brown was Low Church. The existence of this difference of opinion is, however, hardly sufficient explanation of their enmity, as in many cases the High Church lion calmly lies down by the Low Church lamb; and we have seen the High Churchman preach for his brother of Low degree, attired in the latter's sombre Geneva gown, whilst it is not at all uncommon to see a sound Low Church brother, attired in a Moabitish garment, cheerfully assisting in a High Church function.

But their enmity arose thus. Hillsford and Billsford were small towns about twenty miles apart, supporting between them one newspaper, called *The Hillsford Gazette and Billsford Chronicle*, a journal, of course, widely read in both towns and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Being a worldly-wise man, the editor was what his sterner brother of the *Eatonswill Gazette* would have styled a waverer. He had no wish to see a rival newspaper started in the interests of either political party, so he calmly preserved a strict neutrality between the two. His paper was open to all opinions, and hostile to none. His leaders were models of even-handed justice, and if to-day he had in the discharge of his editorial duties to blame Mr. Gladstone, to-morrow he might find something which required altering in the conduct of Lord Salisbury. But he was not very fond of finding out the weak points in an argument or a policy, or dwelling on the dark side of a statesman's character. "There is enough evil," he used to remark, "around us which we cannot fail to observe; let us therefore try to find out the good which so often escapes



notice." It is a remarkable proof of the skill with which he concealed his real opinions, both political and religious, that each party claimed him for their own.

The journal was thus a convenient field of battle on which combatants differing from each other in their views, political or ecclesiastical, could meet in battle array, and freely laud their own opinions whilst abusing those of other people. Many were the fights and long were the letters, deep and subtle the arguments which, week after week, were to be found in the columns devoted to the use of correspondents in the said journal. This happy impartiality of the editor was highly satisfactory to all opposing sections. Did A. abuse B.'s actions as a public man or his political opinions, was B. angry with the editor? Not in the least. He spent the intervening week in composing a powerful reply which would utterly demolish A., knowing that his article would find an equally ready welcome in the columns of the journal.

For some months a war had been raging in the paper touching certain ecclesiastical matters of great moment, in which the Rev. J. Smith and the Rev. R. Brown had taken prominent and opposite parts. This of course, considering their views, was only natural. Mr. Smith, for instance, had written many letters of portentous length, fortified with copious extracts from authors, ancient and modern, living and dead, in support of the statement that collecting the alms in church in round bags, instead of in flat plates, was contrary to all the traditions and customs of the Church in all ages; it was a custom not only purely modern in itself, but distinctly Popish in its tendencies. To which, of course, Mr. Brown replied in letters equally lengthy and numerous, supported by arguments equally powerful and convincing, in order to prove that the use of plates had come down from the time of the Pharisees, who sought, by the jingle of the coins on the plates, to attract their neighbours' ears to the fact that they were giving something, if haply they might also attract their eyes to the discovery of what that something was.

Did Mr. Brown seek to prove that a black gown was not sanctioned by the canons of the English Church, and ask in a tone of triumph what rubric enjoined its use? Mr. Smith would reply with the equally pertinent question, where was the sanction for that purely papistical garment called a cassock? If therefore Mr. Brown proved to his own satisfaction that



Mr. Smith's true place was in the ranks of dissent, Mr. Smith was equally confident that one day Mr. Brown would be found in the Church of Rome, to which indeed, if he were an honest man, he would long since have retired.

There was also a very pretty quarrel as to the legality of a clergyman's going a-fishing in a grey tweed suit. Mr. Brown contended and proved, to his own satisfaction at least, that it was a most unorthodox and unprofessional habit, whilst Mr. Smith, with equal contentment, affirmed and proved that it was one most convenient in itself and sanctioned by the highest authorities.

No wonder therefore they were bitter enemies.

"Dangerous man, that Brown!" Mr. Smith would remark. "Nothing but a Jesuit in disguise. They tell me some of the innovations he is making his rector—very weak man—introduce are totally and purely papistical."

"Dear me," Brown would say, "that Mr. Smith has no idea of decency and order! No business in the Church at all. Why that last letter of his was utterly subversive of all good Church tradition."

It is very evident that each of the combatants considered the other a most unprincipled, or, at any rate, wrong-principled individual. We may add, however, that in spite of their principles they were both hard-working, conscientious parish priests, and extremely popular with their respective flocks. It is impossible to say how long the warfare might have continued, or how much worse enemies they might have become had they continued to remain such close neighbours; but a sudden end came to the fight.

It was not brought about by a truce nor by the signing of terms of peace, but by the flight of one of the opposing warriors. Mr. Smith retired, not only from the contest, but also from the neighbourhood. No, gentle reader, this was not from cowardice or the apprehension of approaching defeat, as you will see from this extract, published on the field of battle.

"We regret to say that our worthy Rector, the Rev. J. Smith, is compelled, owing to failing health, to resign the post he has so long and ably filled. We understand he is about to settle down for a short time in some quiet seaside place before entering upon another and less arduous sphere of work. We wish him well, and can assure him he will carry with him the respect and esteem of all who know him."



## CHAPTER II.

The Rev. Reginald Brown was taking his holiday. The time July. The place Saltburn—a place he much affected, as it offered him all the advantages of a seaside town with the charms of a very lovely inland country.

For several mornings whilst walking on the splendid sands he had been attracted by the appearance of a young lady, who was generally accompanied by an elderly person who might have passed for her mother or aunt. The girl was tall, with a figure which her dress showed off to perfection, fair-haired, with laughing blue eyes, and a complexion which only English air seems capable of either producing or preserving.

Did the Rev. Reginald fall in love at first sight? We cannot say. But at least he thought how nice it would be if he could find out who she was and get an introduction to her. Saltburn would then have another charm for him. What should he do to accomplish his wishes? What? why! the obvious answer was, that he should call on the vicar of the place, offer to preach for him! He would be sure to know all about everybody, and if he did not, why, who could more easily find out?

The Rev. Reginald was successful in ascertaining what he wanted, and by the help of Mrs. Vicar, soon obtained the means of making the acquaintance of the young lady in question, whom he soon discovered to be as charming in manners as she was in appearance. In fact, by the end of three weeks, he had come to the conclusion that he loved Miss Smith, for such was her name, and hoped she might love him in return; at any rate, he meant to ask her.

He did so, and the answer was so entirely satisfactory that it led Reginald to do something else, which also seemed satisfactory to both of them. The interview with the aunt ended favourably to his wishes, as he was able to show her that even then he could afford the luxury of a wife, and might in time inherit a considerable fortune.

The next and final thing was of course to write to Marion's father and ask his consent, which the Rev. Reginald hoped to have no difficulty in obtaining.

The two lovers found the time pass so delightfully in talking of themselves, that it is scarcely wonderful they had exchanged few confidences about their respective friends. And, after all,



under the circumstances, a little trustful confidence is not out of place. If Jane is charming, why the probability is that Jane's mother will be charming too, and if she is not, it is all the more creditable to Jane that she should have persisted, in spite of obstacles, in doing what was so obviously her duty. Besides, you don't want to marry Jane's mother, too, even if it were allowable, so the loss of a few charms on her side is not an overwhelming calamity.

But Reginald did learn that Marion's father was a clergyman then living at Bognor in Sussex. She herself had been living for some years with her aunt, sometimes in England, but generally abroad. Her aunt, she said, had practically adopted her, which Reginald considered proved the aunt's good taste, unless of course she wanted to keep her for ever.

Marion had also learnt from Reginald that, although he was but a curate, still they would not have to wait until he got a living, as he could afford to marry when he liked.

In due time the Rev. J. Smith's answer came. It was decidedly unsatisfactory, and indeed seemed, at any rate for the present, to put an end to all hopes of a happy ending to their romance. But although the reply was so unfavourable, the Rev. Reginald was hardly astonished that it should be so; in fact, had it been favourable, his astonishment might have been even greater.

"Bognor, July 10th, 1888.

"SIR,—I presume, of course, from the tone of your letter that you write in ignorance of the fact that I have recently resigned the incumbency of Billsford and removed here. On becoming acquainted with that fact, I am sure you will hardly be surprised at my declining to receive you as a suitor for my daughter's hand. I could not, consistently with the principles I hold, entrust her happiness to one whose views are not only totally opposed to my own, but also antagonistic in so many points to the teaching and practice of our Church. Even if I could overlook such differences of opinion, I am convinced that your union with my daughter would but result in unhappiness both to yourselves and also to the friends on both sides. I must ask you, as my decision is final, not to persist in urging your suit upon my daughter against the wishes of her friends.

"Yours faithfully,  
"J. SMITH."

"The Rev. R. BROWN."

It was awkward, certainly! To find that the father of the girl you hope to make your wife is the man you have been



fighting with for months in the columns of a newspaper is rather startling, nay, more, it is alarming.

No, Reginald was not astonished at the answer. For his part, he would have been quite prepared to welcome Mr. Smith as his father-in-law in spite of his erroneous views. As he was Marion's father, he must have a great deal of good in him, and besides, men are often better than their creed.

And, after all, when you came to look at the thing, it did not make much difference how the offertory was collected, and, as to going fishing in a tweed suit, well, no doubt it was very comfortable. The Rev. Reginald began to think he had been fighting for victory, rather than for truth.

Well, he must go and see Marion. That was evident. What would she do? Was she a believer in plates? If so, the situation seemed hopeless in the extreme.

On his way to the hotel he encountered Marion, who met him with a countenance that bore traces of recent tears. Holding out a letter to him, she exclaimed, with a voice choking with emotion—

"Reginald, dearest, see what papa says! Can you explain? Oh, how dreadful it is!" And the poor girl began to sob bitterly.

Reginald took the letter, which briefly stated that her father forbade her engagement with him, and told her to come to her home without delay.

After Reginald had explained the mystery of the apparently unreasonable letter, Marion's spirits rose at once; since she knew all she felt happy again.

"After all, Reginald darling, you don't mind plates, do you? I am sure I don't mind bags!"—and Marion looked inquiringly at her lover.

"Well, love, of course, as a matter of principle, I do care," was the cautious answer. "But I don't think I care as much as I did, and perhaps in time——"

"Why, perhaps in time you won't care at all!" said Marion triumphantly; "let me go and write to papa at once!"

"My dear child," exclaimed Reginald in a horrified tone, "that will make matters ten times worse! Why, your father will think I have no principles at all!"

"Well, dear, perhaps that is better than having bad ones," said Marion slyly.

"But you see, love, it is not altogether a question of *my*



principles; it is your *father's* principles too. Why, I have proved—oh, of course I mean”—hastily correcting himself—“tried to prove that *his* are all wrong!”

“What! you have tried to prove that my father is all wrong?” inquired Marion, with mock indignation. “Why, you will be proving, or trying to prove, next that his daughter is all wrong!”

“Well, dear, I am afraid that is just what your father thinks! But, Marion love,” said Reginald in an anxious tone, “I am afraid you don’t take the matter very seriously.”

“Seriously? not a bit. Why, I thought he must have found out you were not a clergyman, or had dropped a baby in the font—we had a curate once who did—or something equally horrid. Why, this is nothing!”

“Well, love, I am afraid your father will never consent! Because really I was very hard sometimes!”

“Hard, were you? Hard on my father? Ah, that’s the reason he won’t allow our engagement, he thinks you may be hard on me!” said Marion, laughing. “But, seriously, Reginald,” she continued, changing her tone of careless banter; “seriously, my father is the best, the dearest, and the most kind-hearted man in the world. Did you see in the paper that the poor people sent a petition hoping he would not leave them; and do you know what they gave him when he left?”

“No,” said Reginald; “I merely saw he had left Hillsford.”

“Well, dear,” continued Marion, “I am sure when my father knows you—and I tell him I love you as dearly as you love me—he will consent in time. He will do nothing to spoil my life, and, besides, I don’t think he objects so much to bags after all”—then Marion laughed again, and continued in an earnest serious tone, “We may have to part for a time, Reginald, for I shall do what my father wishes, but, believe me, I will never give you up, if you will wait. I shall be twenty-one in less than a year, and when that time comes I shall write to you. But, dearest,” she went on, seeing he looked still rather downcast, for he did not feel very hopeful as to Mr. Smith’s consenting; “I know long before that time comes I shall see you with his permission. He is the kindest father in the world, and, if he sees I am unhappy, I am sure he will consent to our engagement. I can look forward quite hopefully to the future. And then, you know, as he is away from Hillsford, he may not care so much about plates,” she added, with an arch smile, “and perhaps, dear, you won’t——”



"Care so much about bags?" interrupted Reginald. "I shall hate the sight of a bag as long as I live!" He said this in such a solemn, lugubrious tone that Marion burst into a merry laugh, in which she was soon followed by her lover.

As soon as the train which bore away his sweetheart was out of sight, the young man hastened to his lodgings and wrote to the Rector of Billsford, who was a very old friend of his, asking him to accept his resignation of the curacy without the usual formality as to three months' notice, and explained the circumstances which made the request desirable, writing also to ask the bishop's acceptance of his resignation. As he had been allowed to work at Billsford without receiving any stipend, he thought he might be allowed to retire without a very long notice. He could not go back to Billsford, that was evident, and he must get away from the chance of seeing that odious journal which had been the means of separating him from Marion.

He also registered a solemn vow that never again would he publish a letter in a newspaper. For any young clergyman, with principles not too firmly grounded, this was perhaps a wise resolution. He then left Saltburn and hastened to town, where he spent some months in helping a friend of his who was the vicar of a large parish in the East End. After he had been there some months, an aunt died who left him some considerable property on condition that he took her name. As this large addition of fortune simply implied the small addition of a syllable to his name, the cheerfulness with which he complied with the condition is not perhaps very wonderful. And, after all, Brown looks more dignified when increased to Browning.

### CHAPTER. III.

It was one evening towards the end of April, and the terminus at Euston was very full of travellers preparing to depart by one of the fast trains for the North. There was a crowd round the ticket-office, and some individuals were getting rather nervous as the Scotch mail was due to leave in a very few minutes. Among the many others was a tall stout man dressed in a suit of light tweed, who asked for a ticket for a sleeping berth for Edinburgh. This was the Rev. J. Smith, who was just bound North for a fortnight's salmon fishing, and, of course, acting upon his principles, had for the time discarded his suit of



customary black and clerical collar, for something more sportsman-like, and for fishing certainly more convenient. He asked for the ticket and took it up. But he could not put down the money for it, for, on searching his pockets, he found, to his intense horror, that they were all guiltless of purse or even the smallest silver coin of the realm. Where was his purse? Stolen? Lost? Strayed? well, that was scarcely possible, but at any rate it was missing.

Where could it be? And then he remembered that, after paying his bill at Charing Cross Hotel, he changed his dress, and must have left his purse in his black coat. After all, it is not always most convenient for a clergyman to assume mufti, even when he goes a-fishing! His coat was in his portmanteau, his portmanteau was in the luggage van, and the train was due to leave in five minutes. Should he rush to the guard and get it hauled out? All in five minutes? Would the guard let him have it? It would be most irregular.

"Now then, sir, four pounds ten, if you please."

"Well really," said Mr. Smith, "I find I have left my purse."

"Well, sir, very sorry, but of course I can't let you have your ticket," said the clerk; and Mr. Smith, feeling anything but comfortable in his grey tweed, was about to depart in utter discomfiture, when a voice said—

"Here! give me that gentleman's ticket and another like it for Edinburgh."

The tickets were duly handed out and paid for by the unknown owner of the voice, which belonged to a young clergyman, to wit, the Rev. R. Browning.

"I see, sir," said he, addressing Mr. Smith, "you are in difficulties; allow me to have the pleasure of helping you out."

"Thank you," replied the Rev. John Smith, "I can't tell you how much obliged I am! I must have left my purse in another coat. Really most awkward! And if you can wait till we get to Edinburgh——"

"Oh! pray don't trouble about that," said Reginald, "and you had better allow me to offer you a little more till we get there," continued he, presenting a sovereign, which was also most gratefully accepted.

On reaching Edinburgh, Mr. Smith asked Reginald if he were fond of fishing, and, on receiving an answer in the affirmative, pressed him to come and join him on the Tay for two or three days if he could find time.



"Well," said Reginald, "I have come on business, but if I find I can spare time, you may expect me; but I have no tackle, as you see."

"My dear sir," eagerly replied the other, "pray don't mention that! I can easily rig you out."

And then they separated, mutually pleased with each other. Reginald found he could spare a few days, and consequently joined Mr. Smith in his fishing, where he enjoyed some very fair sport.

No; the two clerical sportsmen did not exchange confidences with regard to their ecclesiastical views. Reginald was quite satisfied with his experience on that point already. And Mr. Smith was convinced that such a fine, manly young fellow as Reginald—a capital angler too—must hold correct views; that is, of course, views exactly like his own. And with regard to the details of parish work, its trials, disappointments, successes, perhaps Mr. Smith thought that, being in mufti, the discussion of such subjects might appear incongruous, at any rate; he did not open up the subject, and as Reginald's experience was as yet rather limited, why! like a wise man, he kept it to himself. Besides, after a hard day's work, the discussion of pure business would have been a great strain; far better and easier was it over a cigar in the smoking-room at the hotel to fight once again the battles of the day. How splendidly did that last fish fight! What a near shave it was at the end when the man was not quite ready with the gaff! What a killing fly the Scarlet Lady was, and so on *ad infinitum*.

During the few days the two were together they had become fast friends, and this fact led to feelings of deep regret which found expression in such private utterances as these:—

"Ah! what a pity it is," sighed the Rev. J. Smith, "poor Marion did not fall in love with a really splendid young fellow like Browning! None of your namby-pamby men like Brown! A man like that would not spend his time in worrying about such trifles as bags! Although, of course," he added, as principle came in, "such things are quite wrong and totally opposed to all sound Church principles."

"What a fine, genial, large-hearted man Smith is," said Reginald enthusiastically to himself. "Knows how to land a big fish too. Ah, if poor Marion's father were only like him how happy we should have been! Fancy his objecting to a man because he did not like plates! The idea is quite too absurd," and Reginald smiled.



"Browning," said the Rev. John Smith to his friend, when the latter was about to take his departure, "you really must come and see me! I want to show my girls the man who helped their father out of such a scrape, and I am sure they will be delighted to see you. Only unfortunately, as I told you, we are very unsettled just now, quite birds of passage, in fact; so I can't give you a permanent address, but you give me yours, and as soon as we get all straight again I hope you'll come and see us, and if there is any trout-fishing near, why, we'll have a turn together among them."

Of course Reginald said he should be delighted to renew their acquaintance, although he did not feel so sure he should care about meeting the daughters. If they were very nice they would remind him too painfully of Marion, and if they were not he should feel sorry for poor old Smith, who deserved to have nice daughters.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Some two months later, when Reginald was working away in his East End parish, he received the following invitation from Smith:—

"Middleton Rectory, Basingstoke, June 16th, 1889.

"DEAR BROWNING,—We are settled at last. I told you I expected the offer of a quiet country living from a friend, and here we are. Come and stay as long as you can. The Test is in capital order just now. Write and say when we may expect you.

"Yours truly,

"J. SMITH."

Reginald had been working very hard, and this invitation opened up to him the prospect of a very agreeable change, so he wrote back saying he should be down in a day or two.

On reaching the Rectory, to which he was personally conducted by the Rector, Reginald was taken into the study, the Rector observing, "I am sorry all my girls are out, but they have gone to a tennis party. They are fond of all outdoor sports, and are capital walkers, so I hope you will make them show you the country."

The two men continued chatting together for some little time, and then Mr. Smith heard his daughters' voices in the hall, and called out, "Marion, my dear, come here. I want to introduce my new friend, Mr. Browning, to you." His elder daughter had by this time reached the study door, when he continued, "I



hope you will make his visit as comfortable and happy as possible."

Marion certainly began well, for, as soon as she saw Reginald, she rushed forward and threw herself into his arms, which of course rapturously opened to receive her.

The Rev. J. Smith stood aghast. All powers of speech failed him. He rubbed his eyes. Perhaps they were failing too? No, it was an awful reality!

You introduce your daughter to a perfect stranger with the innocent remark you hope she will try to make his visit a happy one, and then she rushes into the said stranger's arms! Had they both gone mad?

Before, however, he had time to think very much, his daughter, tearing herself from the stranger's arms, rushed into his own, gave him two or three hearty kisses, and then exclaimed, "You dear, kind man! I always said you were the best and kindest father in the world! How sweet of you to give us both such a charming surprise!"

Here Reginald, rushing forward, seized both his hands, and, shaking them warmly, exclaimed rapturously, "My dear sir, how can I thank you for this unexpected happiness? How noble of you to forgive those horrid letters of mine!"

Poor Mr. Smith was bewildered. At last, the rapture of the lovers having a little subsided, he was able to gasp out, "Marion, my child, do you know this gentleman?"

"Know him, papa? Why, this is my Reginald!" she answered, looking fondly at her lover.

"And, Mr. Browning, do—do you——"

"Know this lady?" interrupted Reginald. "Why this is my Marion!" and he put his arm once more round her waist.

Mr. Smith looked even more bewildered, but at last stammered out, "And who—who then are you, Mr. Browning?"

"I am sorry to say, Mr. Smith, that I am the late Mr. Brown of Billsford."

"And I, sir, am delighted to hear it!" cried Mr. Smith, also getting excited, as he rushed forward, kissed his daughter, and warmly shook Reginald's hand. "Delighted to hear it; and I am charmed that my daughter has won the heart of such a fine, manly, young fellow! Shake hands once more, Browning. Marion, you have made your father very happy. Kiss me again, my child!"



## A PLEA FOR THE CRITICS.



In his admirable essay "The Choice of Books," Mr. Frederic Harrison has justly complained that our literary fibre has degenerated, and that we have not now the courage to attack the really great books of the world, which every one indeed admits to be difficult at first for the majority. He repeats Butler's complaint, that the time spent in reading is often the worst spent of the day, and pronounces the infinite majority of the books we read to be not worth reading.

Probably everybody who has anything like a conscience in intellectual matters, everybody who recognizes that books are or can be something better than the mere rivals of wine or tobacco in the process of killing thought, will admit that there is some truth in this. The world deserts the great authors, and for what? Perhaps for the newspaper, with its inspiring record of the assembled trivialities of yesterday: perhaps for the last worthless novel which "all the libraries" are offering, whether it be of the school, whose highest object is to reproduce for us with tedious exactness the most insipid and colourless incidents of our every-day life; or of that other which, not content with the empty scum which floats on the surface of life's stream, goes below to search out and bring up the filth which sometimes lies at the bottom. Or if we are not votaries of the novel or the newspaper, there is another alternative suggested by Mr. Harrison. Our literary conscience is strict, and our taste superior, and we have a praiseworthy desire to know something about the great authors: and so we read, not Dante or Shakspeare, but their biographies, criticisms on them, remarks about them. We read, as Mr. Harrison says, "a perfect library about the 'Paradise Lost,' but the 'Paradise Lost' itself we do not read." In fact, we read, not the poets, but their critics.



Any one who seriously believes that the critic is of real use in the world, will see that there is here an accusation which he is peculiarly called on to meet. It is one, too, which a critic who is worth the name must feel keenly, especially if he be old, and have spent many years in lecturing or writing upon literature. He who has perhaps passed his life in loving and grateful study of the great poets, who can never forget that he owes them not only an ever-present possibility of quiet happiness but also moments of intense and inexpressible though secret joy which will stand out clear for ever in his memory ; he who fondly hoped that he was paying some small mite of the vast debt he owed ; he who would ask no better reward than to see all the world bow down before his idols, enter into his joys, love and reverence the masters whom he has so long revered and loved ;—he, the faithful and devoted disciple, finds himself accused of occupying himself the place which is his master's due.

Let us see then if there is not something after all to be said on behalf of the critic. And first a word as to this objection implied rather than expressed by Mr. Harrison ; for he makes no direct charge against the critics. It amounts really to nothing more than this : only a limited amount of time can be given to reading, and of this, criticism occupies a portion which might be better employed. This is certainly a statement to which in itself it is very hard to demur ; indeed no one can deny its truth. But, when called upon to make his reply to it, the critic may justly point out to Mr. Harrison, or to the numerous other people who hold this view, that it is on him that the *onus probandi* lies : he is bound to show that the time spent in reading criticism not only *might* be but actually *would* be better employed, if he succeeded in shaming the critics into silence.

Is he so certain that Dante and Shakspeare and Milton would have more readers if they had fewer critics ?

That may fairly seem more than doubtful, I think. The critics indeed would be the first to take their stand by his side in his crusade on the behalf of the best books ; they have all their lives indeed, if they are not unworthy of their calling, been preaching (in the wilderness) the very doctrine which he is so eager to have accepted ; their profession and their duty is simply a constant sifting of the good from the bad, a patient and unwearying exhortation to the world to refuse the evil and choose the good.

And do they so entirely fail ? The untrained public cannot always judge easily for itself, frequently does not even know



where to look out for good literature and has no time to go through the process of sifting. Dean Bradley, not long ago, confessed in the preface to his *Lectures on the Book of Job* that he had been first led to feel an interest in the subject by Mr. Froude's eloquent study. There are many others who, without being able like the Dean to help the world to share their enjoyment, will never cease to thank Mr. Froude for guiding them to the mysterious book which is the richest and deepest of all the books of the Old Testament, in the eyes of the lover of literature. How many more are there whom the Dean of St. Paul's has brought as willing worshippers to the feet of Dante? or whose enthusiasm for Virgil was first awakened by Mr. Myers? or who owe their first love of Goethe's poetry to Mr. Lewes's brilliant record of the most complete and ideal intellectual life that has been lived since the days of Athenian culture? There are those, too, and not a few, who owe to the greatest of recent English critics their first acquaintance with names, which are of a very different order indeed to those of Job or Dante, or Virgil or Goethe, but which possess each a charm and attraction peculiarly its own: those who will always feel that it is not the least of Matthew Arnold's many claims on their gratitude that it was he who first introduced them to Joubert and to Eugénie and Maurice de Guérin. Instances like these, —and every one who cares for literature could add to them from his own experience—must be enough to prove that the critic is not the mere cumberer of the ground which he is accused of being. Estimated at the very lowest, he performs the functions of the preacher, who, doomed himself to a speedy and certain oblivion, is content if he may be permitted by the discovery of fresh beauties, by the opening out of unsuspected truths, by the mere glow and enthusiasm of his exhortation, to give new life to the book of which he speaks.

This is certainly not the least useful of the critic's functions, and to cite it is all and more than all that is needed for the refutation of the charge of blocking the way that might lead to the great authors. It is not hearing sermons that makes men give up reading the Bible. But however useful and important this function may be, and however sufficient it may be as a defence of those who write criticism, it is not, after all, their principal function. The essential business of the critic is, as his name implies, to judge. Like other and more important judges, he will probably and indeed inevitably deliver himself in the



course of his judgments of remarks bearing on wider issues than that immediately before him. His object in literature, as theirs in law and morals, will be the promotion of "true religion and virtue, and the punishment of wickedness and vice." They seek to encourage right action: he right thinking and right expression of thought. Like them, he has no quarrel with the prisoner at the bar, his judgment is founded on principles and is not affected by personal considerations. In one respect indeed he is far more fortunate than they. They have to deal in their judgments with criminals, or at the best with prisoners accused of crime. The literary judge is often judging one whom he admires. Their most favourable verdict is one of not guilty. His judgment may often take the form of an *éloge*.

The world, or at least the civilized world, has no hesitation in admitting the utility and necessity of the criminal judge, but it is by no means so certain of the reality of the services conferred upon it by the critics. It is quite aware, or at any rate was till very recently, that it would fail ludicrously if it attempted the task of distinguishing between the innocent and the guilty at law. Lately indeed there have been some signs that, even in matters of law and morals, the democracy would like to try its hand at judging for itself. But this is an old story in intellectual matters—and an old story which has not grown out of date. A single stroll through a picture gallery, a single evening in a drawing-room, is enough to show the most hardened sceptic with what easy confidence all the world gives his or her opinion on pictures and books; how far men who have never given half an hour of their invaluable time to thinking about trifles like art and literature are from dreaming that there is anything inappropriate or still less absurd in their uttering so loudly and supporting so stoutly their opinions on Vandyck or Milton?

And yet this is very curious if one sets oneself to think about it! Talk of shooting at a dinner party; you will not hear the men who never shoot laying down the law on the subject; talk of engineering, and you will not find the artists or the lawyers explaining that the Forth bridge is badly constructed. But all the world, engineers and sportsmen, lawyers and parsons, whoever and whatever a man may be, he has not the slightest hesitation in pronouncing a picture bad or a poem good. No one who had not thought or read or had experience on the subject would dream of insisting on his opinion on Egyptology, or Physiology, or Dynamics, or Banking, or Cricket. But people who have not



an idea what literature means often become warm, and more than warm, if their opinion of the superiority of Dickens over Scott or Byron over Wordsworth is disputed or disregarded. Even with regard to music the lay world is inclined to suspend its judgment on Beethoven's Symphonies ; but it exhibits no such modesty with regard to Turner. The absurdity of this state of affairs needs no proving, but it is interesting to try to get at the causes of it. People ought not, no doubt, to express their opinions on any subject which they do not understand. But there are unfortunately a great many people, and very excellent people too, who would very rarely have a chance of expressing their opinions at all on any subject of intellectual interest if this rule were strictly followed, and as no one likes to confess to a universal ignorance, we seize upon the subjects we think least likely to betray us, and we give our opinions on the Royal Academy and Lord Tennyson's last volume. It is obviously easier and probably more interesting to talk about Art than Egyptology ; and besides, when we look at an obelisk we are quite aware that we do not understand its language ; but when we look at a picture, we are never struck by the fact that it too speaks a language which we do not understand. The old hieroglyphics have something mysterious about them ; they even inspire a certain awe which compels silence ; but a picture, what is it but lines and colours which we all understand ? We have eyes, and what more is required ? Probably too we have never dreamt that art has any higher function than to copy nature ; the only question that occurs to us about a portrait is whether it is like or not ; and it has never struck us that a picture is not a photograph, and that, if we pass over the rare exceptions in which the photographer can show his artistic gift by grouping or his composition, the employment of the word "art" with reference to photography is a mere impudent theft for the purpose of advertisement. Turner's "Approach to Venice" is bad art for us, because we have been there and do not recognize it ; his cloud dreams are false, because we have never seen such clouds and do not approve of dreams ; and Reynolds was a bad portrait-painter, because "there never were such women." In a word, we are judging art without knowing what art is. Even our knowledge of the material basis of art, our observation, for instance, of clouds and women, is not nearly so complete or correct as we think ; and, as for the soul of art, the imagination, without which all art may justly be counted dead, we are so far from



understanding its importance that we do not even suspect its existence.

So much for the value of popular judgments in matters of art. It is obvious that popular judgments in matters of literature are formed in the same easy, confident, haphazard fashion. Clearly here is the critic's field all ripe to his hand. In these days we are all occupied in putting something or somebody to rights; why should the critic be blamed any more than the preacher or the politician for trying to persuade his neighbours that good and bad, truth and error, are words which have a meaning, in art and literature as in morals and politics, and that it is on this side, and not on the other, with this poem, this picture, this style, that truth and vitality will finally range themselves?

For, observe, there are two things the critic has to teach: it is not enough to declare the merits of one work and the defects of another. He has to go back to the beginning, place himself in the attitude of Socrates against the Sophists, and try to show that in art and literature we are not at the mercy of the changing opinions of the many, that we *can* discover real truth about them, attain to clear convictions. He will meet with difficulties, for everybody (especially, perhaps, in England) thinks he has a right to his own opinion on these matters; but he will go on patiently and even hopefully for all that. Even in matters of literary criticism, "*fortis est veritas et prævalebit.*"

What, then, is it exactly that he will set himself to do, and what will he carefully avoid doing?

He will carefully avoid large general principles as a snare and a danger. The world will very likely demand them of him as a sort of "sign," but he will not be tempted or flattered into the attempt to give laws to the human imagination. It may well be that fixed rules can be given as to many things that go to make up good literature, as, for instance, the order and arrangement of a book, and, in fact, all that part of literary merit which springs from the intelligence alone. But even here he will be on his guard against the formation of codes; and in all that belongs to the highest part of literature, into which the imagination and the soul enter, he will be well aware that rules are useless, and that the power of judging with insight and certainty, comes, not of applying the most skilfully contrived rules of thumb, but of long and patient study of widely different models, gradually producing a critical taste which, though built up so carefully, has the swiftness of instinct. The truth is exactly as Longinus put it



long ago: ἡ γὰρ τῶν λόγων κρίσις πολλῆς ἐστὶ πείρας τελευταῖον ἐπυγένημα.

And next, he will be unceasingly on the watch against the critic's special danger and temptation—that of insincerity. He will make for himself an inflexible rule—never to praise or blame a man or a book at second-hand. His business is to express his own opinions, and to retain always, as Matthew Arnold says, “an intimate and lively consciousness of the truth of what he is saying.” He may well, like other people, accept the established opinions, and he will always treat them with respect; but, like other judges, he can only speak of what has actually been brought into court before him. He will therefore never allow himself to so much as apply an epithet to a poet in passing, unless the epithet be for him and to his personal knowledge just and applicable. Corneille cannot be for him “le grand Corneille,” nor La Fontaine “le bon La Fontaine,” unless personal acquaintance has made them such. So in one sense he will be independent, or rather self-dependent, almost to pride; for he knows that the thing of all things essential in criticism is genuineness, frank, outspoken sincerity, without which vitality is impossible. But, if he is Protestant in so far as he knows the worth of private judgment, he is Catholic in his large respect for tradition. “Securus judicat orbis terrarum;” “Semper, et ubique et omnibus;” mottoes like these will be always in his mind, and if he finds that in very truth Homer produces but little effect on him, or that his ear cannot catch the majestic roll of Milton's verse, or the sweet and gracious murmur, rising and falling like a summer sea, which the world has loved so long in Virgil, he will be humble and silent, recognizing that these are questions on which the verdict has been pronounced for ever, and which it is not permitted to discuss. He will not pretend admiration, or even quote admiration, where he does not feel it; but he will note himself what faculty it is that is wanting to him—how it comes about that he is denied a pleasure possessed by all the world beside.

So much for the negative side of the critic's preparation for his task. He will avoid as a snare and a danger, all kinds of hard-and-fast rules; and he will avoid, still more carefully, as a fatal, and for his work a finally destructive vice, the slightest touch of insincerity. If we come now to the positive side, what direct aim will he have before him in his self-education, to begin with, and afterwards in his work as a critic?



He will occupy himself first of all with the raw material with which he is to work, the sound basis of a wide knowledge without which he is nothing. A judge's decisions are worthless unless he knows his books, or, to make the analogy with the critic even closer, unless he is well up in the previous cases. Wide reading is, however, more for a critic than a raw material, or even an instrument; it is the food without which he cannot live, or at least cannot be a critic, as necessary for the development of his judgment as beef and bread are necessary for the development of the muscles of a miner or a navvy. With plenty of reading, acted upon by steady thinking, his judgment grows as surely and as silently as the navvy's muscles grow under the operation of plenty of meat digested by regular labour.

And as the body flourishes best under a varied diet, so too with the mind. It is important that the critic's reading should not only be large and constant, but also wide and varied. For, as Matthew Arnold put it, the critic's duty is to give himself up to "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." His aim must therefore be to know all the literatures that are worth knowing; an unattainable ideal, of course, but none the less, like other ideals, stimulating and invigorating. In his reading he will carefully avoid falling into the error of too many old grammarians and pedants, who can never cease correcting and criticising and noting small points, and never give themselves up for a moment to simple enjoyment. He will be well aware that there is no greater error. "They mistake the nature of criticism," says Dryden, "who think its business is to find fault;" he who has never enjoyed intensely, will never judge well.

He will not be afraid to read the lesser authors, even sometimes when they have little merit of their own. Nothing helps us more to appreciate Milton than to read some pages of indifferent blank verse after rising from the "Paradise Lost:" and it has been said, perhaps too severely, of Florian, that his value for us is that he teaches us to appreciate La Fontaine. It is, in any case, certain that to fully realize the high qualities of the great men, we must be acquainted with their inferiors; for all judgment is comparison as all knowledge is relative; we should never be duly grateful to a great colourist if we did not know by experience the poor and cold effect produced by the greatest of bad colourists.

"All study to be useful," said Mark Pattison, "must be in a



spirit of deference, though not," he immediately adds, "in a spirit of servility." It is in this way seeking everywhere to enjoy and to understand and yet not afraid also, when necessary, to condemn, that a man may gradually build up for himself a power of judging in literature. He must be always ready to hear appeals against his first impressions: it may indeed sometimes happen that the matter is too clear to allow of any question of "granting a case" for a second hearing; but the great names at least who have held their own for a century or more may claim a right of appeal. There is no surer test. Weak productions, whether in literature, art, or music, lose on further acquaintance; the great men gain. There must be a great many average unmusical people who were puzzled and wearied when they first heard a Symphony of Beethoven, and who never miss one now when they can help it. It is the same thing, probably, in spite of the 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality,' with the enjoyment of beautiful scenery, a thing most important for any one who occupies himself about poetry in any way. The appreciation of beauty in nature, as in art, seems to develop slowly often by force of varied experience and comparison. There are people, for instance, who date an immense increase in their feeling for nature from the day they settled in London. A critic of poetry should, of all men, try to love and understand nature, for how much of what is best in literature has been inspired by the magic of natural scenery?

I have been talking of literature, and saying that it is the critic's business to enjoy, understand, and judge literature. Will it be thought too presumptuous if I say one or two words on the difficult question of what literature really is?

I am certainly not going to attempt a definition. Definitions of ideas so delicate and so difficult to exactly grasp as literature or poetry, are rarely quite satisfactory, because they so rarely bear the test of close examination, still less the harder test of universal application, though they remain of course extremely valuable, presenting as they do generally some side of the truth, put in pointed language such as will stick to the memory. But what I want to allude to here is not so much a definition, but a view of the nature of literature taken by a man who was himself a master craftsman in the art, and whose every word commands great and universal respect. In his *Lecture on Literature* in "The Idea of a University," Cardinal Newman maintains that it is of the essence of literature to be personal. "Literature is of a personal character. Science treats of what is universal and



eternal. In proportion, then, as Scripture excludes the personal colouring of its writers, and rises into the region of pure and mere inspiration, when it ceases in any sense to be the writing of man, of St. Paul or St. John, of Moses or Isaias, then it comes to belong to Science, not Literature. St. Paul's Epistles, then, I consider to be Literature in a real and true sense, *as personal, as rich in reflection and emotion as Demosthenes or Euripides.*" "On the other hand portions of the Gospels, of the book of Genesis, and other passages of the sacred Volume are of the nature of Science. Such is the beginning of St. John's Gospel which we read at the end of Mass. Such is the Creed. I mean passages such as these are the mere enunciation of eternal things, without—so to say—the medium of any human mind transmitting them to us. The words used have the grandeur, the majesty, the calm unimpassioned beauty of Science; they are in no sense Literature, they are in no sense personal."

Now I suppose every one will go along with this theory up to a certain point. Literature, like Art, cannot be the mere scientific statement of a fact. "Mr. John Brown lives at No. 2 Oxford Street," is no more literature than a merely correct drawing of Mr. Brown's house is art. Mr. Brown's house must be seen by the eye of the imagination if the picture is to have the claim of art as well as the value of truth; and the fact that Mr. Brown lives in it, must, if possible, also be viewed through the imagination, and receive from it a certain form and colour before the statement of that fact can become literature. But, according to Cardinal Newman's doctrine, "literature has to do with ideas and science with realities," and therefore, presumably, realities are out of the scope of literature, and a statement of a simple fact, however grandly expressed, cannot be literature, because it is universal and not personal.

Now is this really so? It is certainly a difficult conclusion to accept, and yet I do not think I have misinterpreted Dr. Newman, for not only does he recur again and again to the word "personal," but the instances he cites seem to point the same way. He expressly excludes the opening verses of St. John's Gospel from the pale of literature as the "mere enunciation of eternal things," and the Creed is placed in the same category.

I think one has only to extend a little the application of this view to be alarmed at it. The words "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" form a perfectly plain statement, certainly with nothing personal about them. They are,



therefore, I suppose, not literature, according to Cardinal Newman's theory ; and yet every one must, I think, feel that Longinus was right when he, though no adherent of the new religion which brought the Jewish books into prominence, went out of his way to cite them as an example of the sublime ; that they are in fact literature, and literature of a high order. The fact is stated in a way which impresses and fills the imagination ; just as it impresses and fills the imagination in Milton's line—

" In the beginning how the Heavens and Earth  
Rose out of Chaos."

Can it be questioned that the two passages stand on the same plane, the one as good prose, the other as good poetry ?

To take only two other instances, it has been often remarked that we can find out nothing about Homer or Shakspeare from their works. There is nothing personal, that is, in their poetry. No definition of literature could of course deliberately exclude Hamlet or the Iliad ; but there must surely be something defective about a definition that has, even in appearance, to be strained before it can be made to include them.

Literature must be something larger than this "personal" theory would allow, unless I have been misinterpreting it. There have been people who would wish to call all apt expression of thought, Literature ; but we cannot help feeling that if we accept a wide definition like this, we shall be forced to call many things Literature which, as a matter of fact, we never really think of as literature at all, mathematical treatises, for example. May we not say, without being rash or presumptuous enough to pretend to any exact definition, that literature is something which deals with facts or ideas in such a way as to appeal to the moral, or emotional, or imaginative side of human nature ? Thus Euclid's Elements, however apt in expressing the thoughts intended to be conveyed, are not literature ; they appeal simply to the intelligence, no one is touched by them. A book like Macaulay's 'History of England,' or even 'Aristotle's Ethics,' on the other hand, though containing many bare statements of plain matters of fact, and therefore scientific in Cardinal Newman's sense, is literature, because as a whole it does touch the moral, and emotional, and imaginative parts of our nature.

Accepting this then as a rough idea of what literature is, let us go back to the critic, to our ideal critic. Literature will have



given him his subject-matter, moral and philosophical studies will have trained his judgment, art and nature enlarged and purified his imagination. He now comes to set to work. What will be the qualities he will look out for in literature, by the presence or absence of which literature will be for him good or bad?

May we say that the first quality which must be displayed in literature is the power of thinking, the second the power of imagination, and the third the power of expression? They will naturally be exhibited in varying degrees by different men. A few, like Shakspeare and Plato, will have them all. Some, like Keats, will have the second more than the third and far more than the first; though if his style has sometimes something confused about it, and sometimes something effeminate, he will show us here and there in those isolated magic pages of his, the power of imagination and the power of expression, united in an unapproachable perfection, as in his 'Ode to a Nightingale,' to cite only one instance:

"The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn:  
The same that ofttimes hath  
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn."

Then there are others who, like Aristotle, will have the first in far more striking measure than the other two. And with others, like Milton and Virgil and Tennyson, it will be the third that will be the supreme gift.

These are the three gifts to be demanded, or at least desired, in all literature. There are others required by special forms of literature. The dramatic gift enters into the excellence of very widespread forms of literature, and where it is needed its absence is a serious drawback, as, for instance, in the 'Paradise Lost,' and almost everywhere in Byron. A subtle narrative power, easily maintaining the interest, is again the special need of the epic.

Taking these then, or something like them, as large general rules, as to what to look out for and demand in literature, a trained judgment will safely rely upon its own acquired instinct for the rest. Indeed it mainly needs such rules to prevent its being carried away by a personal taste for one side or aspect of literature. It is good, for instance, to have something which will keep us from forgetting, in the midst of our enthusiasm for



Browning's dramatic power or his thinking power, whether it be the spirit of his thought that we care about, or the ingenious intricacy of the dialectics in which he liked to clothe it, that the absence of the higher qualities of style, the want of anything like sustained dignity in expression and the want of clearness, are serious defects even in the midst of the richest thought, the most speaking and lifelike portraits. It is only in this way, by a large conception of what is required in literature, following upon wide reading, that an instinct for what is really good can be attained, and to spread that instinctive taste is one of the critic's most useful tasks.

How many things taste of this sort, if it once become general, would alter in our popular reading and in our habits of life, there is no need here to enquire. My only object has been to try to restate the grounds on which criticism may not only be defended, but gladly accepted as a work which confers real services on those who care for literature. Every profession has its ideal, aimed at by its better members, if rarely or never attained; and if a high ideal is of any service, there can be very few men who have a higher set before them than that I quoted just now, which Matthew Arnold sets before those who occupy themselves with criticism, "a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world." I make no apology for quoting the words again; for I do not know where the man who gives much time to reading literature or writing about it, without laying claim himself to original or creative powers, can find a better principle to go upon by which to direct his life. To learn to know the best and then to propagate it; and that is, may we say, to make it both better known and greater in quantity. For the critic ought certainly to be always on the look out to extend his patrimony. The world can never have too many really good books. And this is the task the great critics have always set themselves. We find Boileau constant in his efforts to make his contemporaries see that they had in Molière something more than a writer of very funny farces; Addison was determined that the public he influenced should recognize the greatness of Milton; and, to come to more recent times, Coleridge and Carlyle have stood out before the public as in some sort the sponsors and interpreters, the one of Wordsworth, the other of Goethe.

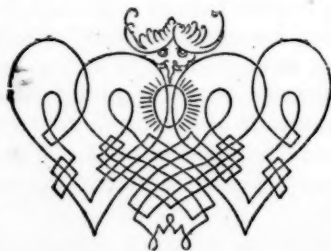
But with that phrase of Matthew Arnold's in our minds, we may pass to a larger world than that of the critics, whether



great or small. For in truth they contain a principle of life on which every one may well act. An endeavour to learn the best that is known and thought in the world, is an endeavour to put our intellect to its highest possible use, and we all have an intellect of some sort. Why should not our intellect, however various, find as much help in an unattainable intellectual ideal, as our equally various characters do in the unattainable ideals of duty which religion puts before us? And then the endeavour is to be "disinterested"; that is to say, it is to be free from prejudice and party feeling, undertaken solely with a view to get at the truth. What could be a better corrective of our inveterate habit of looking at all questions, especially questions political and ecclesiastical, from a party point of view, than an unbiassed attempt, in the hour or few hours we may be able to give every day to reading, to look at things with an open mind and aim simply at truth? And then, once learnt, we are to propagate the best that is known and thought in the world. Is there nothing inviting in that? We are all so anxious now-a-days to be missionaries of something or other, to be proselytising for one cause or another. Where can we find a better outlet for our missionary zeal?

Let us then not only not despise or blame the critics, or fancy them superfluous invaders of the literary domain: let us not only recognize that they are, like the rest of us, useful if they try to do their duty, and not otherwise; but let us remember that we can all help them to do their work and join in it ourselves, if we will but seriously try to put our powers of mind to the highest use we can, and aim at getting for ourselves and others, some real glimpse of truth, some real power of thinking justly, soberly, and impartially.

J. C. BAILEY.





## MRS. HIGGINS'S STRANGE LODGER.

BY HUGH MAC COLL.



### CHAPTER I.

"HE DO TALK QUEER, DOCTOR."

SOME fifteen years ago I was a young doctor struggling to obtain a footing in the town of Hilchester. It was uphill work, for, in addition to the disadvantages of youth and inexperience, I was poor and friendless. Every other doctor in the town, as a matter of course, kept his brougham. I went my round of visits—and a very little round it was—on foot, and told my patients I preferred it, as I found the exercise beneficial. This was not quite an untruth. As a matter of fact, I did prefer walking to driving, and there is no doubt that my health benefited from the exercise. But I must own at the same time that I had not much choice in the matter; a carriage was out of the question. Now that I have one I do not use it more than I can help. When it is fine weather and I am not pressed for time, nor tired, I still prefer walking to my patients' houses; but then people now know that I do this purely from choice and not from necessity. They did not know it then, or they did not believe it, which amounts to pretty much the same thing, and my prestige suffered in consequence.

One evening I was seated in my modest little consulting room scribbling an article for a magazine—for in those days, as now, I dabbled occasionally in literature—I heard a ring at the bell, and a minute or two after the servant brought in a note. I opened it and read as follows:—

"53, Minnow Lane.

"DEAR SIR,

"Our lodger, Mr. Lee, has been suddenly taken very bad. If you please come and see him.

"Your obedient servant,

"GEORGE HIGGINS."



This Higgins was a poor shoemaker whose wife I had been attending quite recently ; but I knew nothing of this lodger, Mr. Lee. I had heard more than once, in the course of my visits to their house, some one coughing in an adjoining apartment, and had made the remark that I did not like the sound of that cough ; but as neither the shoemaker nor his wife volunteered any information about the sufferer, I did not care to ask any questions. My immediate inference on reading Mr. Higgins's note was that this was the "lodger" I was requested to go and see.

And I was right. On my arrival I found in a small dingy room, lying in a rickety, but tolerably clean-looking bed, the emaciated form of a man about fifty. A few dark streaks in irregular patches here and there diversified the general whiteness of his bushy beard and scanty hair ; his black eyes shone with a feverish brilliancy, and his sunken cheeks were coloured with a peculiar flush which indicated the nature of his malady only too plainly.

"He do talk queer, doctor," said Mrs. Higgins in a whisper. "He is quite off his head !"

"Who is this ? Why did you let him come in ?" suddenly asked the sick man, in a quick agitated tone, as soon as his eyes lighted upon me.

"It's only the doctor," said Mr. Higgins ; "you said we might send for him, you know."

"Oh, the doctor," he replied, seemingly much relieved. "Give him a chair, and leave him alone with me."

Neither Mr. Higgins nor his wife offered to move.

"He do talk queer," said the latter again ; "but he seems more sensible-like now."

"Will you please to leave the room while I have a talk with Dr. Dunbrook," requested the sick man again, in a very decided tone.

"Very well, Mr. Lee," replied the shoemaker, moving towards the door and almost forcing his wife to accompany him. Her curiosity had evidently been powerfully excited by their sick lodger's "queer talk," and she was very reluctant to forego its gratification.

"Now, Dr. Dunbrook," said Mr. Lee, when they were gone, "come and examine me, and let me know how long I have to live."

There was clearly no delirium now, whatever might have been the case before I came. I went to him, felt his pulse, and



sounded his chest. When I had finished, I kept silent for a little while, wondering what I had better say. He regarded me with a wistful, anxious look.

"Well," he said at last, "how long?"

"With care," I replied, "you may yet last several months, but you may also go off in a few weeks or even days."

"Which is the most likely event?" he asked.

"The former, if you take care of yourself; the latter, if you don't, and especially if you indulge in alcoholic liquors," I said, pointing to a suspicious-looking bottle and glass standing on a table not far off.

"You are mistaken," he replied, "I don't drink; at any rate not habitually. I was seized with a shivering fit to-day, and drank a little hot gin-and-water to warm me. That's all."

"I am glad to hear it," I said; "alcohol would finish you off very quickly. I do not approve of it even as a remedy for a shivering fit. A cup of hot milk and a warm bed would have been better. Were you in bed when you were seized with the shivering fit?"

"No, but I jumped in—or, to speak more accurately, crawled in—directly I had taken my grog."

"That was right; but another time take no grog. Drink some hot milk and send for me at once. At present there is no immediate danger."

I thereupon wrote out a prescription for him and was getting up to leave, when he begged me to sit down again for a minute. I complied.

"You're sure there's no immediate danger?" he asked.

"There's nothing absolutely sure in this world," I answered; "but I don't think so. If you follow my instructions and take care, you will get over this attack in a day or two."

"In that case," he said, "I would rather put off what I have to say to you till a future occasion, for it is not pleasant. I will not, therefore, detain you longer in this hole, which you cannot find pleasant either. Here is your fee, Dr. Dunbrook."

As he spoke he thrust his thin, wasted hand under his pillow, and drew out something wrapped up in a small piece of paper and offered it to me.

"Pray don't talk of a fee, Mr. Lee," I said. "I cannot under present circumstances accept it from you."

"Excuse me, Dr. Dunbrook," he said, "but you *must*, I insist upon it. This is your *second* mistake."



Here he was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing. "This is your second mistake," he resumed, when the fit was over. "Judging hastily from appearances, you thought I was a drunkard; and now, judging hastily from appearances again, you think me a pauper. You are as wrong in the last supposition as in the first. It is not through poverty that I have elected to take up my quarters in this modest room and somewhat unaristocratic locality. This is a mere trifle, and I only press it upon you because, by your own admission, there is a possibility—though I hope not a probability—of my going off suddenly. I have a service to ask of you yet for which you will be paid handsomely; but it is not a pleasant subject to discuss, so we will put it off till I am better."

"Is it a service which I can render you consistently with my professional and other duties?"

"Perfectly. The unpleasantness is for me, not for you."

"Very good, Mr. Lee, we will discuss it, as you propose, another day. I will call again to-morrow, when I expect to find you much better." With that I bade him good-bye and left.

The next day I found him better—decidedly better, though of course, I knew that the amelioration was only temporary. Upon that point he had no illusions either; he knew as well as I did that his days were numbered, and that the number, though indefinite, was not a very high one. He might last, as I had told him, for several months; he might even last over a year; but, from the condition of his lungs, the end could not be far distant. His paroxysms of coughing, though painful enough when they came, were less frequent than one might suppose.

"What is the mystery which surrounds this man?" I asked myself. "What can have induced him to bury himself in such a place?" In confirmation of his assertion that, in spite of appearances, he was not poor, I had the evidence of what he had given me the evening before; the something wrapped in paper which he had extracted from under his pillow was a couple of sovereigns. Two sovereigns given unasked—nay, thrust upon me—indicated neither pauper nor miser. His conversation too was that of a man of culture and education. On my second visit, as soon as he had learnt that I found him decidedly better, he cast aside the subject of his illness, and talked with me on general topics, mainly politics and literature, but he made no allusion to the mysterious service which he expected me to render him by and by.



When I rose to leave he again thrust his lean, wasted hand under his pillow and brought forth—not anything wrapped in paper this time, but a purse. With shaking hands he opened this, and took out two sovereigns, the same sum as before. I would have again declined, observing that, however rich he might be, it was more than my usual fee; but he again insisted impatiently, peremptorily, almost angrily; so I pocketed the money without more ado, as any other sensible man would have done.

The following day I called upon Mr. Lee again and with pretty much the same result. He was rather better; we talked pleasantly for half-an-hour or so on things in general; and when I rose to go he again thrust his thin, wasted hand under his pillow, fetched out his purse, and gave me my fee of two sovereigns.

This went on for a week or so longer. When he was well enough to leave his bed, I told him that though I was of course very glad of his money, as I was far from rich, I must conscientiously inform him that there was now no real necessity for my coming so often; that I thought a weekly visit would be enough, unless he had another attack, when, of course, he should send for me at once.

"That's all nonsense, Dr. Dunbrook," he said. "Let it be understood that you come every day, whether I am better or worse, unless I especially tell you that I don't want you. These daily morning chats do good to my mind if not to my body, and if I choose to have them and pay for them I can't see why you should offer any objection."

To this I replied that I should be very glad indeed to pay him a visit every morning, especially as, quite apart from my fee, I really enjoyed a chat with him, but that I had thought it my duty to place the truth before him.

Weeks passed in this way. Mr. Lee's condition remained pretty much the same. The progress of the disease, though sure, was slow, slower than I had expected. He never spoke of it, and did not like me to do so if it could possibly be avoided. And as for death—not merely his own approaching end, but the death of any one, of even a stranger—he could not bear the mention of it at all. The most distant allusion to the King of Terrors made him tremble. This I attributed to his ill state of health, combined with constitutional nervousness—though, even after making due allowance for these causes, I still thought it abnormal.



One day, however, I had a partial explanation ; and on the same occasion he enlightened me also as to the service which he should by and by require of me.

"Dr. Dunbrook," he said, "I daresay you have sometimes wondered that I should have such an abject horror of death, and in your heart you have probably put me down as a miserable coward. That I am so *now* it would be useless to deny ; nay more, I will confess that I have been a coward—a wretched, trembling, despicable coward—for the last twenty years or thereabouts. Yes," he said with a shiver, "it was about twenty years ago ; I could give the exact date, but there's no need. I am a coward now, but I was no coward before that terrible event happened."

Mr. Lee here lapsed into silence and stared straight before him at vacancy. I made no attempt to divert the current of his thoughts, which I knew were wholly engrossed with the reminiscences of the past. But my curiosity was powerfully excited, and it was with much inward impatience that I awaited his account of the terrible event in question.

"Since I have gone so far," he at last resumed, "I may as well go further and have done with the subject now and for ever. The fact is I saw a dead body once, and the sight so upset my nerves that they have never got over it since."

"Is that all ?" I exclaimed. "Surely you do not regard that as a terrible event. I have seen many a dead body, though I am a good many years younger than you."

"Yes, yes, I know," he said impatiently. "Doctors, I am aware, cannot learn their profession without experiences of that kind. But this was in a forest, far away from human habitation. I was alone. I came upon it suddenly, and ugh ! the worms were eating it—I cannot go on."

His lips trembled and a spasm passed through his whole body, but still, after a brief pause, he resumed :

"I knew only too well whose that body was, though the features were utterly unrecognizable. Don't ask me to tell you how I knew, that you will learn by and by. But I did know ; be that sufficient for the present. Since that day I have had a complete horror of death, and I want you to save me from such an awful fate."

His face grew flushed, and I began to think that his mind was wandering.

Alas ! no doctor is a match for the universal conqueror. Skill and science may now and then repulse a premature attack ; but



the final victory is always his. How *could* I save the wretched man from the "awful fate" which he so much dreaded? The shadow of that fate was already upon him, and I thought he knew it.

"Save you from death?" I said, "I wish I could, and myself too. Sooner or later we must all, rich and poor alike, be laid in the silent earth by the great leveller. But come, Mr. Lee, it is not such a dreadful thing after all. Our exit from this life is usually a painless one. A torpor seizes the senses and we gradually sink into unconsciousness. That's all. Pretty much like ordinary sleep, except that there are no dreams and no awaking.

"You misunderstand me," he replied. "It isn't the mere exit from this life, as you call it, that I shrink from. *That* I hope I can face with sufficient courage, and if I cannot, you cannot help me. The dread terror from which I want you to save me comes *after* death."

"What can he be driving at?" I mentally asked. "Surely," I said aloud, "a clergyman rather than a doctor would be the proper person to consult in such a matter."

"A clergyman!" he exclaimed in a tone of ineffable contempt.

"Or a priest," I said, "if you are a Roman Catholic."

"Neither clergyman nor priest can render me the service I require," he replied in a quick querulous tone, "and if you had your usual wits about you, you would not be so confoundedly slow to understand me. I have no fear of hell or the devil, or that apocryphal worm that dieth not; but I have a fear—a most illogical fear I own, but still a most real fear and horror—of that other living, material, filthy worm that bores into the decaying flesh and marrow. That's the awful fate from which I want you to save me. In plain words, I want you to see that my body is cremated as soon as possible after the life has departed from it."

"Ah! now I see your meaning plainly, Mr. Lee. I could not at first understand what you were hinting at. That, then, is the service which you told me some time ago you wanted me to perform for you."

"Quite so, and for which I also said you should be handsomely paid. Do you consent?"

"Give me time to think. There may be difficulties in the way."

"None, I hope, that cannot be got over. Now listen to my



proposal. In my will I shall insert a clause that you receive £1000 if I am cremated ; £500 if I am embalmed and not cremated ; nothing but the daily fee which you receive from me while living, if I am neither cremated nor embalmed. From those foul worms I must be protected somehow. Embalming *might* afford the required protection, though less surely than cremation, which would certainly be effectual. Now that I have made my meaning plain to you, will you give me your promise to carry out my wishes when I am gone, to have my body cremated if possible, or if that cannot be done, to have it embalmed ?”

I gave the required promise at once. A thousand pounds, or even five hundred, was not a sum to be despised, especially in those struggling days.

“Thank you,” he said, fervently ; “you have removed a great load from my mind. Now let us talk of something else and never allude to the horrid subject again. You’re an unmarried man, I believe, Dr. Dunbrook ?”

I was struck by the abruptness and irrelevancy of the last remark, but I attributed it to his eagerness to change the subject of conversation, so I replied that I *was* an unmarried man, and likely to remain so.

“Always ?” he asked.

“Probably,” I answered ; “at any rate for some years. The plain truth is that I cannot afford the luxury of a wife.”

“Luxuries which are not always blessings,” he said in a singularly bitter tone ; “but still, from a purely mercenary money point of view, I am not sure that you would not get on better in your profession if you were married. There is a prejudice, not wholly unreasonable, against young doctors who have no wives at home to keep them steady.”

“There’s much truth in what you say,” I replied ; “but still I like my liberty and have not yet met the girl for whom I would sacrifice it even to secure the advantages you speak of.”

“Sensible man ; but——”

Here Mr. Lee was interrupted by a paroxysm of coughing. What was to have followed his “but” I never knew, for all further conversation was prevented by a knock at the door, followed almost immediately by the entrance of Mrs. Higgins with the announcement that a young lady wanted to see Mr. Lee.

Mr. Lee, who was still coughing, made an impatient movement with his hand to indicate, as I thought, that he did not want to



see anybody. Mrs. Higgins, however, misunderstanding, or perhaps affecting to misunderstand this gesture, invited some one outside to "walk in." The person addressed accordingly did walk in.

The picture of what followed is still vivid in my recollection. Mr. Lee essayed to speak, but the effort only renewed his coughing-fit. The new-comer, a handsome young lady, with dark hair, eyes and complexion, Italian type, stopped abruptly and regarded him in silence with a pitying, troubled expression of countenance. I rose from my chair and bowed respectfully. Mrs. Higgins quietly and softly shut the door, and remained to hear and see.

"Who are you?" asked Mr. Lee, when he had got over his coughing-fit.

"My answer, I am afraid, will startle you," she replied. "Must I answer now?"

I took up my hat and was going to wish Mr. Lee good-bye, but he stopped me.

"Don't go," he said; "I may want you." Then, turning to Mrs. Higgins, he said, "Fetch another chair."

There were only two chairs in the room—the arm-chair in which Mr. Lee was sitting, and the chair from which I had risen. This I was offering to the young lady; but she did not or would not see it. Her eyes were riveted on Mr. Lee.

In a few seconds Mrs. Higgins returned with the chair, and placing it in the middle of the room, said, "Please to sit down, Miss."

"Miss" did sit down, but in an absent mechanical sort of way, with her eyes still riveted on Mr. Lee. I stood uncertain whether to go or stay; seeing which, Mr. Lee pointed to my chair and bade me almost imperiously to be seated. I sat down, wondering much what was coming. Mrs. Higgins shrank into the darkest part of the room, as if to escape notice; but Mr. Lee's eye sought her and his finger pointed significantly to the door. The look and the gesture were not to be mistaken; so she strode indignantly out of the room, and shut the door after her with a sharp brusqueness that was quite uncalled for.



## CHAPTER II.

MR. BURTON.

"Now that we three are alone," said Mr. Lee, addressing his mysterious visitor, "I should like you to answer my question, Who are you?"

"I repeat that my answer may startle you. Must I give it in the presence of this gentleman? It isn't his fault, for he wanted to leave and you would not permit him."

"He is my doctor, and the only friend I have in the world. I don't care to be left alone with any stranger, male or female; so please to tell me at once who you are and what you want?"

At this moment I fancied I heard a suppressed sneeze just outside. Acting on a sudden impulse, I rose from my chair, marched softly but swiftly to the door, and opened it quickly, drawing it towards me with a jerk. Whatever tragedy might unfold itself later on, the immediate result was comical. The bent form of Mrs. Higgins, with her head down, like a bull in the act of charging, plunged into the room and fell flat down. She had evidently been leaning in a stooping position against the door with her ear to the key-hole.

I offered to help her to her feet again; but she pushed my hand aside, accompanying the action with a spiteful evil glance, and got up unaided. With a flushed face and thoroughly discomposed air she stood staring at Mr. Lee.

"Well, madam," he said sternly, "this is an odd way of entering a room! What have you to say for yourself?"

"I thought you'd called me, sir; my foot caught in the mat."

"Don't try to impose upon us by such transparent stuff as that," he said. "Be off, and don't listen at the door again; or, mark my words, you'll repent it."

Mrs. Higgins turned round and walked away without another word. She took Mr. Lee's warning to heart, for though I suddenly opened the door at irregular intervals after that, I found no one outside it.

"Now," said Mr. Lee, in a rather lower tone, when he was satisfied that she was gone, "I am waiting for an answer to my question."

"You ask me who I am?" replied his handsome dark-eyed visitor; "will it surprise you to hear that I am your own daughter?"

Evidently this announcement did surprise Mr. Lee, and very



considerably. He convulsively grasped both arms of his chair, stared at his *soi-disant* daughter for a moment or two, and then sprang bolt upright as if galvanised.

"Your proofs," he demanded.

"Mr. Burton," she replied.

"A letter from him?"

"No; a verbal message only. I saw him in Manchester."

"Let me hear it."

She looked at me. Then she walked up to him, and whispered in his ear. In a moment the feverish unnatural strength left him, and he dropped weak and trembling into his chair.

"Enough," he said faintly.

"You are now convinced?"

"Yes; say no more at present."

I had already risen from my chair and taken up my hat. I felt that I had no right to stay any longer, whether Mr. Lee wished it or not. But this time he did not oppose me.

"I won't detain you, Dr. Dunbrook," he said. "Matters have taken a turn which I had not expected."

"Shall I call to-morrow as usual?" I asked, as I held his hand to say good-bye.

"Yes, if you hear nothing to the contrary," was his reply.

So I said good-bye to him, bowed to his visitor, and left.

When I called next morning I found the same lady with him. He at once introduced me to her.

"Dr. Dunbrook, allow me to introduce you to my daughter, my only child, Miss Lee."

"She is not married then," was my mental comment. The thought brought a curious feeling of satisfaction with it. We had certainly made each other's acquaintance in very remarkable if not romantic circumstances, and certain future possibilities loomed vaguely in my thoughts.

"Allow me to thank you cordially, Dr. Dunbrook," said Miss Lee, offering me her hand, "for your great kindness to my father. He has told me all about it. You will excuse my leaving now that you are come, as I have an engagement which cannot be put off. Cheer him up, as is your wont. Good-bye, Dr. Dunbrook. Good-bye, father, till to-morrow."

With that she left us, much to my regret.

"So you find, Dr. Dunbrook, that the actualities of real life are stranger than the inventions of fiction," was Mr. Lee's first remark after the departure of his daughter.



"So it seems," I said.

"Did yesterday's drama appear to you under the aspect of tragedy or of comedy?"

"On the whole of tragedy. The only comic element was that supplied by Mrs. Higgins."

"The sneaking, inquisitive cat! That woman's uncontrollable curiosity will work mischief yet if I don't mind."

"She will not readily forgive me for the trick I played her."

"I don't believe she will; but you are beyond the reach of her malice. I, unfortunately, am not."

"Surely you are not obliged to stay in this wretched house?"

"At any rate, I do not find it convenient to leave it. But let us change the subject. How old are you, Dr. Dunbrook?"

Though rather startled by the abruptness of the question, I felt no motive for concealment, so I answered promptly that I was thirty-one.

"From what you have told me, I understand that your practice in this town is not a large one."

"Neither large nor lucrative. It just enables me to make both ends meet, that's all."

He was silent for a minute or two, and appeared to be buried in deep thought. Then he sighed wearily and asked, "What age would you give my daughter?"

Though again struck by the strangeness of his question, I answered without hesitation that I thought she looked about twenty-five.

"She is just twenty-seven," he said—"only four years younger than yourself."

Here a violent paroxysm of coughing seized him. When it was over, he seemed thoroughly exhausted, and showed no inclination to speak. But I wanted to hear more about his daughter, so I asked him if she was aware of his real condition.

"Oh yes, quite aware of it," he answered. "I have something on my mind which I wished to say to you about her; but this coughing-fit has completely knocked me up, and I cannot enter upon the subject now. I will do so when you come to-morrow. Longer than that I must not put it off, for I feel that my end is drawing near. I am afraid you must leave me now; I want to collect my thoughts and put things in order before I vanish into ashes. Don't forget your promise. I was afraid my daughter would cross my wishes in that matter; but she has promised not to do so."



The end was not so near, however, as he feared. Next day when I called he felt better and put off the promised communication about his daughter, nor did he allude to the subject for many days after. Meanwhile I gradually got better acquainted with Miss Lee. I found to my astonishment that she was governess in a family which had recently come to the town for a short stay. I had been sent for professionally to see a member of that family and thus came across her accidentally. As I passed her on the staircase she had an opportunity of whispering to me, "For God's sake don't recognise me, and say nothing about my father."

I need not say that I scrupulously complied with this request. When I was afterwards formally introduced to her I bowed quite gravely as to a complete stranger. In the course of several visits which I made to this family I managed, without appearing in any way unduly inquisitive, to learn a good deal about her. She had been a governess in the family for four years, and was very much liked and respected both by her pupils and their parents.

There was some mystery about her, however. She was very reticent as to her history, though she had let it be understood that she had no relative alive except her father, who, she said, was in Australia. She was a governess rather from choice than from necessity; for regularly every six months she received a remittance of £60 from her father through a certain Mr. Burton, a lawyer in Manchester. But beyond this nobody knew anything. Except on the two occasions already mentioned I never met Miss Lee when I went to see my patient in Minnow Lane, and I learnt from him that she had only called once after. For reasons which he did not explain, it was his express wish that she should not call upon him. I saw her several times in the house where she taught, but always in the presence of others. I never found an opportunity of speaking to her alone, though I much desired it, and not from curiosity alone. There was another motive more respectable. I felt strongly attracted towards Miss Lee, quite independently of the tie of interest which bound me to her father, and—and—in fact, I may as well speak plainly, I felt myself overpowered by the all-conquering passion. If I wanted to penetrate the mystery which enveloped her, it was in order to ascertain what obstacles, if any, might lie in the way of my aspirations.

But at last I obtained a clue to the riddle, and from an



unexpected quarter. One evening, while I was turning over in my mind conjecture upon conjecture, hypothesis upon hypothesis, the servant brought me word that a gentleman wanted to see me, at the same time handing me a card on which I read *Mr. Charles L. Burton, Solicitor*. A minute after I found myself face to face with the lawyer through whom Miss Lee received her half-yearly remittance.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE COUSINS.

Mr. Burton, a stout, grey-haired gentleman of about sixty, plunged at once into the object of his visit.

"Dr. Dunbrook, I come on the part of our mutual friend, Mr. Lee."

"Pray sit down, Mr. Burton; I am very glad to make your acquaintance."

With these preliminary words we both sat down, and Mr. Burton began:—

"Two days ago I received a letter from Miss Lee, from which I learn that you have entered into an engagement with her father to have his body cremated when he dies, an event which I understand (fortunately perhaps for her) is not far distant. I hastened over here as soon as I conveniently could on receipt of this news and called upon Mr. Lee, whose money affairs are, as perhaps you know, entirely in my hands. He has placed me in possession of all the circumstances, and has also commissioned me to speak to you upon some other delicate matters which he had not the courage to speak of himself. *Why* he should think it necessary to acquaint you with things which, as far as I can see, do not concern you in the least, I cannot imagine; but that's his affair. He has claims upon my friendship for certain services which he rendered me in the past, and it is my duty to carry out his wishes. I dare say you have often wondered that a gentleman of Mr. Lee's means should take up his quarters in such humble lodgings and in such an obscure part of the town of Hilchester?"

I replied that this certainly had caused me some surprise.

"You must have also thought it odd that he did not recognise his own daughter when she called upon him, and that he even demanded proofs of the alleged relationship?"



I told him that I had been present on that occasion, and that the circumstance had astonished me not a little.

"Has Mr. Lee ever explained to you why he was so anxious to be cremated?"

"Well, yes," I said. "He told me that he had once, when alone in a wood, come suddenly upon a human body in an advanced state of decomposition, and that the recollection had haunted him ever since."

"Ah, yes; all turns upon that miserable body. It explains not only our friend's wish for cremation but some other things as well. Did he tell you *whose* body that was?"

"No, he did not; but he said that he knew it, though the features were unrecognisable, and that I should learn about it by and by."

"And you shall learn about it, and at once. Mr. Lee has sent me here this evening to tell you about that dead body and about some other things as well."

Here Mr. Burton drew his chair closer to me, bent his head forward, and sinking his voice almost to a whisper said—

"Dr. Dunbrook, will you give me your word of honour not to reveal to a human soul—at least, while Mr. Lee is alive—what I am going to tell you?"

I hesitated.

"Can I consistently, with honour and duty, keep the secret?" I asked.

"Undoubtedly," replied Mr. Burton, emphatically, though still in a low voice.

"Then I promise; but stop. It is understood that I only bind myself to keep silent during Mr. Lee's life."

"That's all; though I think your own sense and discretion will counsel a longer silence."

"Then go on, Mr. Burton; you have my promise."

Mr. Burton thereupon drew his chair still closer, bent his head still further forward, and in a still lower tone said—

"Dr. Dunbrook, will it startle you to hear that *our friend killed that man?*"

I was startled—very much startled.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "You don't mean to tell me that Mr. Lee—'our friend,' as you call him—is a—I cannot bring myself to say the word."

"Don't say it," he said; "every one who kills is not *that*. But in a Court of Justice he might find it extremely difficult to



convince a jury that the word you were going to pronounce was not applicable to him. I feel sure it is not, because I know the man and his antecedents, and can take account of important facts which nevertheless no judge would admit as legitimate evidence. But let me put you in possession of the facts, so far as I know them, and then you can form your own opinion."

Mr. Burton thereupon communicated to me his story. I will relate it briefly, as its incidents, though tragic, are only of importance as throwing light upon events which happened subsequently, and which constituted a *dénouement* as surprising to Mr. Burton as it was to me.

Mr. Lee—more fully Mr. George Herbert Lee—had a cousin of nearly the same name. This was George Henry Lee. When they were boys and young men, the cousins were singularly alike, a fact not greatly to be wondered at, as their fathers were twins. But they were very unlike each other in character.

The latter, though clever, was as viciously disposed as the former was upright, straightforward, and honourable. When they were both twenty-three they fell in love with the same girl, a certain Miss Brown, with whom and with whose family Mr. Burton was well acquainted. Both sought her hand. With the full approbation of her friends, as well as in accordance with her own inclinations, she accepted and married George Herbert the upright, to the bitter disappointment of George Henry the vicious. Almost immediately after their marriage young Mr. and Mrs. Lee went to Australia, where they settled and prospered. Two years after, the discarded suitor, George Henry Lee, suddenly vanished, nobody knew why or whither. It was suspected that he had fled to escape his creditors, and that the place of his destination was Australia. But this was only conjecture; nothing was absolutely certain. The conjecture, however, was right—at least in part, for he certainly turned up in Australia not very many months afterwards, though whether the pressure of debt was the main motive of his flight is questionable. The coldness, verging upon open quarrel, which their rivalry had created between the Lees, did not prevent George Henry from seeking out his cousin George Herbert in Australia and calling at his house. The preceding facts Mr. Burton regarded as beyond doubt; but the rest of his story, which rested entirely on Mr. Lee's word, was less satisfactory. It contained some improbable, if not inconsistent elements, and Mr. Burton confessed that if



he had not the fullest confidence in Mr. Lee, from his knowledge of his antecedents, he might have hesitated to believe him. According to the latter's account, his cousin called upon him, renewed his ancient friendship, stayed with him some weeks, and became at last too familiar with his wife. Mr. Lee did not care to go into all the details, which he spoke of as too painful to dwell upon; but he informed Mr. Burton that the first time he came across his cousin after his discovery of the intrigue was in a solitary wood many miles from his house; that there they had a quarrel, followed by a desperate fight—a duel without witnesses—with their bowie-knives, in which his cousin fell never to rise again.

Mr. Lee never returned to his home after. Leaving his cousin's body where it fell, he betook himself immediately to the bank in Melbourne where his money was invested, converted the whole, except a portion which he settled upon his wife and child, into transferable Government stock, and prepared to leave Australia for ever.

At this point I asked Mr. Burton if the child he spoke of was the Miss Lee with whom I was acquainted. He replied that she was, and then went on.

"But moved by some mysterious impulse," said Mr. Burton, "Mr. Lee felt that he *must* visit the scene of that duel before he left the country, and he did. The result he has told you, and I need not dwell upon its sickening details. The sight has haunted him ever since, and made his life a burden to him. He wrote to me—I was in Melbourne at the time—acquainting me with the intrigue which he had discovered between his wife and his cousin (saying nothing, however, of the duel in the forest), and requesting me to see that the income which he had settled upon his wife and child should be regularly paid them.

"He did not call upon you then?" I asked, as a vague suspicion crossed my mind.

"No, I never saw him till a few months ago, when he paid me a brief visit in Manchester."

"Were you well acquainted with both the cousins?"

"I was with Mr. Lee—our Mr. Lee—but not with the other."

"Go on, Mr. Burton," I said. "I beg pardon for having interrupted you."

"Since then," continued Mr. Burton, "Mr. Lee has been a wanderer on the face of the earth; and now he has come here to this obscure little town of Hilchester to end his wanderings



and his life together. There are some perplexing things in his story, however, which I cannot fathom. He never communicated with his wife except through me, and I could not persuade him to do so. I called upon her and found her in terrible distress. She vowed to me most solemnly that there had been no intrigue between her and her cousin, whom she said she hated (she did not know then, and I didn't, that he was dead) from her past recollections of him, but as he had renewed his friendship with her husband, and was, moreover, uniformly polite and respectful to herself, she had always tried to conquer her antipathy. Her manner seemed so truthful and convincing, that I was led to believe her, and I wrote to her husband begging him to reconsider his decision, and urging him strongly to call upon his wife and ascertain the real facts of the case. He replied briefly that he had had ample proofs of her guilt, and refused to have anything more to do with her. I wrote again, enclosing a letter from his wife. Both were returned to me from the dead-letter office. Mr. Lee had vanished, and all traces of him were lost. His poor wife, whom I believe to have been perfectly innocent, died ten years afterwards. Before her death she entreated me to see that her daughter was properly brought up and did not want, and she also solemnly commissioned me to tell her husband, if ever I came across him, that with her dying breath she declared her entire innocence, even in thought, of the infidelity with which he charged her—she knew not on what grounds."

"And the cousin?" I asked. "Was nothing ever heard of him? Was his body never found?"

"Not till a few months ago, when his skeleton was discovered with a rusty bowie-knife sticking in the chest. You know the duel, if such it may be called, was fought far away from all human habitations, and in a thick wood."

"And Miss Lee?" I asked. "What were you commissioned to say to me about her?"

"I had almost forgotten that, the most important part of the whole probably in your estimation," said Mr. Burton, smiling. "But it wasn't much, after all. Her father has taken it into his head, from various remarks which have escaped you, that your heart has some leaning towards her; he fears that circumstances will soon turn up which may point to him as the murderer of his cousin, and he wants you to know the real facts of the case. He also wants you to know that, owing to my representations, his belief in his wife's guilt has been considerably shaken, so that



no blot need attach to Miss Lee in your eyes through either of her parents, if marriage should ever be contemplated between you."

"I suppose it was to escape detection that he came to Hilchester, and buried himself in the obscurest part of it?"

"Undoubtedly. Indeed he has told me so."

"Is that all he commissioned you to tell me, Mr. Burton?"

"That is all, Dr. Dunbrook."

"Well it's a strange story, and has started strange thoughts in me."

"Ah! may I know them?"

"It would not be right to express my suspicions till they have a more substantial foundation."

"At all events I have your solemn word of honour not to breathe a syllable of what I have told you, at any rate while Mr. Lee is alive."

"You have; but within what limits? Does my promise preclude me from speaking on the subject to Mr. Lee himself?"

"No, I don't see that it does. He did not tell me to make that condition."

"I am not debarred then from questioning him?"

"You must exercise your own discretion as to that; but I wouldn't, if I were you, unless he broaches the subject first. Remember his state of health, and how much those reminiscences upset him."

"If my suspicions are correct, he does not deserve that I should be so sparing of his feelings."

"What on earth do you mean, Dr. Dunbrook?"

"It all turns upon that little word *if*, Mr. Burton. I said *if* my suspicions are correct."

"What suspicions?"

"If I find they are well founded, you shall know them."

"And his daughter? Remember his daughter."

"I have the highest regard for Miss Lee—indeed I must confess to a still warmer feeling. Trust me, I will do nothing that would throw a slur upon her name or prejudice her interests. By the way, Mr. Burton, I have a favour to ask of you with regard to her. What is your present address?"

"The Albert Hotel. What is the favour you wish to ask of me?"

"That you give me the opportunity of speaking to Miss Lee alone. I sometimes see her at the Hendersons, where she teaches, but always in the presence of Mr. or Mrs. Henderson, or



of the children. You are known to be trustee for the £120 income settled upon her, so that it would not be at all out of place for you to ask for an interview with her at your hotel on business matters. The visit could be managed easily. I only ask for a few minutes during which I could acquaint her with the state of my feelings."

"Wouldn't a letter to her be a simpler course?"

"No; Mrs. Henderson informed me that Miss Lee never received any letters except from you, so that a letter in my handwriting would be sure to arouse inconvenient curiosity."

"Well, I will, if you wish it, ask her to call at my hotel; but she must not be inveigled, as it were, into a trap. She must understand clearly *why* she is wanted. Write a letter to her, which I shall enclose in mine. That will be the most straightforward course."

"Thank you; I will. How long do you think of staying at Hilchester?"

"That depends. I *had* thought of leaving the day after to-morrow; but I am deeply interested in Mr. Lee's affairs, and, if necessary, I can stay longer."

"Then I will write to Miss Lee to-morrow, and you will kindly enclose my letter in yours."

"Very good, Dr. Dunbrook; but if I help you in this matter I think I am entitled to some confidence in return. What are the mysterious suspicions at which you hinted just now?"

"I did not want to tell you till I had cross-questioned Mr. Lee and thus confirmed or disproved them. Forgive my apparent distrust."

"Certainly; but having excited my curiosity I must beg you now to satisfy it."

"I will. Let me tell you then, Mr. Burton, that I have grave doubts as to the truth of Mr. Lee's story. I am not satisfied that he is the man he professes to be. I do not believe him to be Miss Lee's father."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Burton, in a tone of the most unfeigned surprise. "You surely cannot have listened very attentively to my story. Miss Lee was born in Australia before her father's cousin left England."

"You misapprehend the drift of my remark, Mr. Burton. I am as firm a believer in Mrs. Lee's innocence of that intrigue as you are. I will lay my suspicions more plainly before you. I believe the man now rapidly drawing near his end at



Mrs. Higgins's to be—not the upright and honourable George Herbert Lee whom you knew of old—but his vicious and criminal cousin, George Henry Lee.”

“What!” exclaimed Mr. Burton a second time, and more astonished than ever.

“Yes, Mr. Burton, I believe his tale of the intrigue to be pure fiction invented to lend plausibility to his falsehoods. Of course, I have no positive proofs, but I feel convinced that this treacherous George Henry Lee murdered your friend, his cousin, George Herbert Lee, and then personated him in order to obtain possession of his money. Didn't you tell me that in general appearance and features there was a strong likeness between the cousins?”

“I did, and can vouch for the likeness, for though I was personally acquainted with only one of them, I once saw the photograph of the other and could have sworn it was that of the cousin I knew.”

“You can therefore imagine what a temptation this would throw in the way of a needy, unscrupulous, and daring man, such as you represent the original of that photograph to have been; and add to this the scarcely less powerful motive of revenge. Weigh all this, Mr. Burton, and then tell me if my suspicions are wholly unreasonable.”

“They indicate a *possibility*; but still the probabilities are, I think, the other way. The risks run would be tremendous. The assassin would have to present himself at Messrs. Gilmore and Co.'s bank, where his victim was probably well known. The likeness would of course help him; but there would be the difficulty of counterfeiting his cousin's voice, which I never heard was similar, and there would be the still greater difficulty of successfully forging not only his signature but his general handwriting.”

“Were you well acquainted with the handwriting of your friend before this alleged duel and the rest of it?”

“Fairly so. A few letters passed between us, of which one or two are still in my possession.”

“Letters written before that tragedy?”

“Yes.”

“You have also letters written—or professing to have been written—by the same man after the tragedy?”

“Yes, I have all those.”

“What do you say to my proposal that we should compare those letters?”



"I have no objection. Come to my hotel to-morrow. Though I still think your suspicions erroneous, I will give you every facility for testing them. But in that case, hadn't you better defer both your cross-questioning of Mr. Lee and your letter to his—well, to Miss Lee—till we have first examined the letters?"

"It would be better and I will do so; but as I am anxious to resolve my doubts speedily, I hope you will not mind a rather early visit from me to-morrow. Can I call upon you at nine?"

"Yes, at nine to-morrow morning I shall be quite ready for you."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### "SEND HER AWAY."

At nine next morning I went as agreed to the Albert Hotel, and found Mr. Burton ready and waiting for me. He proceeded at once to the business which had brought me.

"Here are the letters," he said. "These three were certainly written by my friend, George Herbert Lee. I received them from him *before* the alleged duel. These four I received *after* that tragedy. The latter profess to have been written by the same man. Compare the handwritings and tell me whether they bear out your suspicions or not."

The first three letters referred to matters which have nothing to do with this story. The other four related to the alleged intrigue, and to the other real or supposed events of which Mr. Burton had already given me the history.

I scrutinised the handwritings closely, and was obliged to confess that they did *not* bear out my suspicions. All the seven letters appeared to have been penned by the same hand, and the signatures especially were exactly alike. Each letter was signed George H. Lee, in a free, bold, flowing hand—exceedingly difficult to imitate.

"I must own," I said, "that I find nothing to confirm my suspicions in these letters. But neither do I find ought to remove them. There have been clever forgers before now, and I do not see why George Henry Lee, an utterly unscrupulous scoundrel on either supposition, should not be one of them."

"Just look at that signature," said Mr. Burton, "with its bold, free dashing flourishes; he must be a clever forger indeed who



could copy it successfully. Can you detect anything cramped or hesitating in any portion of it?"

"I cannot say that I do, but I must draw your attention to the fact that the signature, George H. Lee, happens to be the correct one for both cousins, so that long practice in signing his own name would help to give freedom to Henry's hand in imitating his cousin Herbert's style of doing so, especially if, as is not unlikely, the two styles resembled each other in any case."

"But still the fact remains that your examination of the letters, instead of supporting your hypothesis of personation would rather lead to a verdict against it. On what other grounds then do you base your suspicions?"

"On several: firstly, the inherent improbability, not to say inconsistency, of his story; secondly, his unnatural conduct towards his own, alleged child; thirdly, his studious avoidance of an interview with you; fourthly, his ever-haunting recollection of that alleged duel, which, if my suspicions are correct, was no duel, but a cold-blooded murder; fifthly, his morbid fear of being apprehended; sixthly, but really I think I have given enough."

"You have certainly enumerated a goodly number," said Mr. Burton, smiling; "but they do not appear to me, either individually or collectively, as weighty as you consider them."

"Very likely, Mr. Burton; but remember I have seen much more of Mr. Lee, the man staying at the Higgins's, than you have, and my recollection of his talk, and more especially of his manner, lends additional importance to the circumstances which I have stated. By-the-way, didn't you say that Mr. Lee's money affairs were entirely in your hands?"

"They have been so for the last eight months—ever since he read about the discovery of his cousin's body. He saw it in the *Standard*, in an extract from an Australian paper. Then it was that he called upon me at Manchester—to my no small surprise, I can assure you—placed his money concerns in my hands, and took to hiding. He was very ill even then, and a doctor in London had told him that in all probability he had not long to live."

"Why did he place his money in your hands?"

"He had such a morbid fear of being apprehended that he dared not present himself anywhere in order to claim the income due to him for his stock certificates. I draw the money and send it to him in Bank of England notes."



"How was it that he never thought of changing his name?"

"I believe he did travel under an assumed name before he called upon me in Manchester, and he certainly wanted to hide here under an *alias*; but to this I would not consent. I refused to send the money to him under any name but his own, as I did not want to be a party to any species of untruthfulness."

"And this shuffling on his part never aroused your suspicions?"

"I attributed it, and do still, to morbid, nervous fear consequent first upon that deplorable duel, and now aggravated by a hopeless and most depressing disease."

"For the word 'duel,' Mr. Burton, substitute, 'murder and forgery,' and our opinions will exactly coincide. But we cannot settle the point by discussion. I will question him to-day—at first cautiously, so as not to excite his alarm, and then I will act as circumstances may suggest."

"Well, do as you think proper, Dr. Dunbrook. We have the same object at heart, the interests of Miss Lee, the daughter of my ancient friend, be he the dead or the living Mr. Lee. Go and put your questions, and let me know the result as soon as possible. I will await you here."

I thereupon left him and betook myself immediately to Mr. Higgins's to see Mr. Lee.

"The missus says he's been talkin' queer agin," was the shoemaker's greeting to me as I passed through his shop.

"Ah!—then I am afraid he's worse," I replied, and passed on.

"Talking queer, is he?" I said to myself. "I should much like to listen to his queer talk. I have remarked that when patients 'talk queer' they sometimes let out queer secrets."

I knocked at his door. No one answered; but almost immediately after it was softly opened by Mrs. Higgins. There was a slight flush upon her face and a strange light in her eyes.

"Shall I go?" she asked, in a pointed, sarcastic tone.

"It's not for me to say," I replied, in as gentle a voice as I could assume. "Mr. Lee must answer that question."

I did not wish to offend Mrs. Higgins. She had heard Mr. Lee's queer talk, and I did not know what this might lead to. As I had expected, she stayed.

My very first glance at my patient showed me that he was feverish and excited. He beckoned me to him, and when I was near he whispered—

"Send her away; she worries and frightens me!"

And he looked frightened. His eyelids quivered and his eyes



dropped when they encountered the stony stare of Mrs. Higgins. Evidently a great change had come over him within the last twenty-four hours. The woman had obtained some power over him and had made him feel it. It was necessary that I should get rid of her; but I did not want to add another cause of enmity to the grudge which she already bore me. So I adopted a conciliatory manner. Going up to her, and slipping half a sovereign into her hand, I said in a low voice—

"Mrs. Higgins, we must humour him in his present queer mood. He wants you to leave; so please do so. But I want to speak to you confidentially about him presently."

She seemed flattered by the confidence and mollified by the coin.

"Very well, sir," she said, with an unpleasantly-knowing smile, and departed.

"What did you whisper to her?" asked Mr. Lee sharply when she was gone.

I put my finger on my lips and pointed to the door.

"Hush!—not so loud," I whispered. "She may be listening. I have bribed her to go. She looks as if she knew something. Have you told her anything?"

"Not knowingly; but she said that my mind had been wandering and that I had let the cat out of the bag in my delirium."

I said nothing, but felt his pulse while I thought.

"Well," he said at last, "how do you find me?"

"Very feverish," I replied. "Your mind is clear now, but I am afraid there will be a return of the delirium."

"Then you think I have been delirious?"

"Undoubtedly you have, and you will soon be so again."

This threw him into an agony of fear.

"Oh, stay with me till it is over," he entreated. "Don't let that woman come in and hear me!"

"Don't be afraid. I'll watch over you, and she sha'n't come in," I said soothingly. "But really, Mr. Lee, if you have nothing on your conscience except what you commissioned Mr. Burton to tell me, you have no cause to be so apprehensive."

"Appearances are against me."

"They are to a certain extent, I own; but not enough to convince a jury, supposing you were to be put upon your trial; a supposition, however, Mr. Lee, which you may rest assured will never become a fact."



"How do you know that?"

"I am afraid my answer will afford you little comfort."

"Explain yourself, Dr. Dunbrook; don't speak so mysteriously."

"I have no wish to do so, Mr. Lee; the time has now come when it is my duty to speak plainly, and hide nothing from you."

"Don't stop," he said petulantly; "speak quick and tell me."

"My meaning then is this—before the machinery of the law could be put in motion for your arrest and trial, you will be beyond the law's reach."

"What! Is my end so near as that?"

"I am afraid so," I said gently. "I don't like this high fever and delirium."

"But I was so before—months ago, when I sent for you first."

"Yes, but you had then more strength to battle with it. I am sorry to say you are much weaker now. Mr. Lee, I speak to you as I should like to be spoken to myself in the like circumstances. If you have any wishes besides those which you have already stated to me, anything to propose about your daughter, for instance——"

I stopped suddenly, startled by the expression which came over his face.

"Send her away!" he said in a hoarse, terrified voice, staring wildly towards the door.

I turned sharply round, fully expecting to see Mrs. Higgins. But no one had entered; there was nobody in the room except my patient and myself. Evidently his mind was again wandering. The delirium had returned sooner than I had expected.

"Send whom away?" I asked.

"His wife!" he said in an awe-struck whisper. "I thought she was dead."

This confirmed my suspicions, and hardened my heart against the pity which I might otherwise have felt.

"Whose wife?" I asked in a low voice, putting my ear close to his mouth.

"*His* wife, *his* wife!" he repeated in increasing terror. "Stand between us; don't let her see me."

"The wife of the man you killed?" I asked in a whisper.

"In a duel, remember, in a duel; we must stick to that," he whispered in return.



Then he suddenly directed his eyes again towards the door and said—

"She's come again. Send her away, doctor ; send her away ; send her away !"

"Who is she ?" I asked, still in a low voice.

"His *wife*," he said in a confidential tone, "and she thinks herself my daughter. Isn't it funny ?"

With that he burst into a horrid laugh. This brought on a paroxysm of coughing. When it was over, he seemed exhausted, and laying his head down upon the pillow, appeared to doze off to sleep. I sat for some time by his bedside watching him. The feverish flush gradually left his face, and gave place to the sickly paleness which was its usual colour. At last he opened his eyes. As I had expected, he was no longer delirious.

"Are you still here ? How long have I been asleep ?" were his first words.

"About half an hour," I told him.

"Have I been delirious ?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, Mr. Lee, you have."

He looked at me earnestly and inquiringly without speaking.

"What did I say ?" he asked at last.

"You said things which greatly surprised me," I answered gravely.

"What were they ?"

"Things which it will do no good to repeat, Mr. Lee. I owe you much, and your crimes towards others do not cancel the obligations under which you have laid me. The promise which I have made to you I intend to keep, provided—

"You mean about the disposal of my—my body ?"

"Yes ; you may make your mind easy about that, provided—"

"You are now going to make conditions ?"

"Conditions which it is my duty to exact, and which you ought not to find difficult to fulfil. You cannot now make restitution to the dead ; you cannot make restitution to your cousin George Herbert Lee whom you murdered, nor to his dead widow whom you foully slandered ; but their daughter is still living, and whatever restitution may still be in your power you must make to *her*."

I stopped and waited for an answer ; but he made none. He withdrew his eyes from my face, and was silent.

"Your time is short, Mr. Lee," I said ; "have you nothing to say ?"



Then he raised his eyes and looked me steadily in the face.

"On what authority do you bring those charges against me, Dr. Dunbrook?" he asked.

His tone was calm and cold, and not without a certain dignity. His self-possession staggered me. What if I should be mistaken after all? I began to think I had been too precipitate, and now regretted it.

"My suspicions were first roused," I said, "by the story which you yourself commissioned Mr. Burton to tell me, and your strange utterances in your delirium have confirmed them."

"My strange utterances in my delirium!" he repeated contemptuously. "How much would those weigh in a Court of Justice?"

"Probably nothing," I said. "They might not even be admitted as evidence. But, Mr. Lee, you are not now in a Court of Justice, and you never will be. Even if Mr. Burton and I were to betray you—which we have no intention of doing—you are now quite safe from *that* danger. I have already told you why."

"How long have I to live?" he asked, in the same calm self-possessed tone which struck me before, and which was in such contrast to his habitual nervousness.

"Probably not many hours," I answered. "It would be cruel to deceive you."

"Yet at this moment I feel stronger in mind and body than I have done for a long time."

"I see that," I said, "and the sign is not a good one. This fleeting strength heralds your final dissolution. Use it while it lasts to make the only reparation now in your power—a full confession."

He was silent for some time, and appeared to be reflecting. Then, as if he had suddenly made up his mind, he said in an emphatic decided tone, "I will."

After a short pause, he resumed.

"Let me have pen and paper, and send for Mr. Burton."

"You are not strong enough to write," I said. "I will do that from your dictation and you shall sign the paper in the presence of Mr. Burton and myself."

"I will write it myself," he said. "Give me pen and ink, and that flat book to lay the paper on."

I gave him what he asked for. Then I pencilled a hasty note to Mr. Burton and went out and gave it to Mrs. Higgins, requesting her to take it immediately to the Albert Hotel.



## CHAPTER V.

## "IS THIS MY MOTHER'S LIKENESS?"

Mrs. Higgins had gone to put her bonnet and shawl on, and I was beginning to apologise to her husband for sending her off thus hastily, when I heard Mr. Lee coughing violently; one of his usual troublesome paroxysms had seized him. This I thought most unfortunate, as I feared it would exhaust the little strength left him before he could write his confession. I stopped to listen. Presently I heard him make a peculiar noise as if his breath caught. This was immediately followed by a gurgling guttural sound which struck my ear ominously. In an instant I rushed back into his room. My fears were only too well founded. The pen had dropped from his hand; he had sunk down upon the bed; his head was lying motionless across his right arm; and blood was oozing from his mouth. I knew at once, though I put my ear to his heart for confirmation, that death had already overtaken him.

I snatched up the paper upon which he had been writing. It only contained the words

*"I, George Henry Lee, h—"*

He had commenced his confession, but the last spark of life had gone out before he had time to finish it: Still, even that momentary flicker had been sufficient to illumine one dark page in the dead man's history and render it plainly readable. My suspicion was now converted into certainty. Lying lifeless before me I beheld—not the father of Miss Lee, but his assassin.

While absorbed in contemplating the paper which I held in my hand, I was startled by hearing an awe-struck whisper by my side.

"Is he dead, sir?"

Turning sharply round I found myself face to face with the shoemaker. Unperceived by me, he had entered the room softly after me.

"Quite dead," I replied, instinctively removing the paper from the range of his vision.

"You needn't do that," he said; "I've seen it."

"You rather startled me, Mr. Higgins," I replied. "I did not know it was you. There is no reason whatever why you should



not see this paper. Look, it won't enlighten us much as to his past, which I suspect was a strange one."

"I suspect it was, sir; he said queer things when he was off his head."

"Did you hear him then?"

"Yes, sir, and so did my missus."

"What were they, Mr. Higgins?"

"I dunno exactly, can't quite remember; but he spoke of somethin' bein' a duel and not a murder, and was always afraid of the police comin'."

Just then his wife came in, with her bonnet and shawl on, ready to start.

"It's all over, Mrs. Higgins," I said.

"Lor' have mercy upon us! is he dead?" she exclaimed, casting a horrified look towards the bed.

"Quite dead. Go immediately with the note to Mr. Burton."

She hurried off without another word. When she was gone I again questioned her husband about their lodger's delirium, and what he had said in it, but without eliciting anything of importance.

Mrs. Higgins returned soon after with Mr. Burton and, to my astonishment, made signs to her husband to go out with her. Whether she was awed by the presence of death, or whether she wanted to speak to him in private, I cannot say; but the lawyer and I were not sorry to be rid of the pair. I acquainted Mr. Burton in a few words with all that had taken place since I left him.

"Well, Dr. Dunbrook," he said, "I must give you credit for your penetration. The scoundrel, I confess, succeeded in imposing upon *me*. What had we better do under the circumstances?"

"Don't you think Miss Lee should be at once communicated with?" I asked.

"Certainly; but we must not ask her to come here—at least not yet."

"Of course not. What do you propose?"

"First tell me what the people here—these Higgins—know about this man's history."

"I have just been questioning the husband; it appears they suspect something from certain remarks which escaped him in his delirium, but I don't think they know anything definite."

"Suppose we call them now and question them?"



I agreed to this, and we called in the shoemaker and his wife. They answered our questions readily, and did not seem at all reticent, but they were not able to add anything of consequence to what we already knew. Their lodger had said "queer things when he was off his head," talked sometimes of a "duel," at other times of a "murder," and was always afraid of the "police," but they had been unable to connect these wild remarks into any consistent whole.

When we had finished our cross-examination of the Higgins, Mr. Burton proposed that everything belonging to the dead man should be placed under seal; this was done in the presence of the shoemaker and his wife, and then we left the house.

"I will call upon Miss Lee," said Mr. Burton, as we walked along; "and inform her of what has taken place; then we all three will hold a consultation in my hotel, or wherever else Miss Lee chooses. Meanwhile, you go to my hotel, unless you are pressed for time, and wait for me there."

To this I agreed and we separated.

I had not to wait long. In less than half an hour Mr. Burton arrived, accompanied by Miss Lee. She was very pale, and the hand which she extended to me trembled in my grasp.

"I cannot understand it," she said, as she sank down into the chair which I had placed for her.

"Try and be calm, Miss Lee," I said gently; "it is no doubt hard to realize."

"But is it really true?" she asked, fixing her large dark eyes upon me with an intensity of gaze which was almost mesmeric.

"It is quite true that he is dead," I answered. I did not commit myself further, as I did not know how much Mr. Burton had told her.

"Yes, I had expected that," she replied; "but is it true that he was not—my father?"

A perceptible shiver passed through her as she hesitatingly pronounced the last words.

"I see Mr. Burton has told you all," I said.

"No, he has not; and I *want* to know all. *Do* tell me," she entreated.

Here Mr. Burton interposed.

"My dear Miss Lee, do calm yourself; you shall hear all in due time when we have looked through the dead man's papers. Excuse me for a few minutes, while I examine some documents which I have upstairs. Dr. Dunbrook here knows more about



the matter than I do, and will no doubt give you all the information you require."

With that he left us. We were in a private sitting-room, which he had specially engaged for this interview.

"Do tell me," she repeated, when he was gone.

"What do you know already? What has Mr. Burton told you?" I asked.

"My mind is all in a whirl; I cannot grasp the situation. Is it true that he was not my father?"

"I am sure he was not."

"Why are you sure? Did he say that he was not?"

"Not in so many words; but we infer it from what he said, and especially from what he wrote. What was your father's full name?"

"George Herbert Lee."

"That was not the name of the man now lying dead at 53 Minnow Lane. Look at this paper. It is the beginning of a confession which he was in the very act of writing when death suddenly seized him."

She took the paper from my hand.

"'I, George Henry Lee,'" she read in great excitement. "Why, that was the name of his wicked cousin!"

"Just so, Miss Lee. And that wicked cousin, dead to-day, personated your father and obtained possession of his property."

"And my real father—where is he?"

I was silent, and tried to collect my thoughts for a suitable answer.

"Where is he?" she repeated, impetuously. "Where is he?"

"Alas! he died years ago."

"Where? In what way? How do you know? Tell me all! Don't keep me in suspense."

The wildness of her manner frightened me.

"My dear Miss Lee," I said, "try and be calm, and I will tell you all I know."

Then I recounted to her very briefly, and with as much softening of the tragic events as I could, the leading facts of the story which Mr. Burton had communicated to me, and I added thereto the various circumstances—such as the man's delirium, which had confirmed my suspicions that her father had been first murdered by his cousin, and then personated. The confession which the latter had begun, and was unable to finish, now put the matter beyond all doubt.



"I am now quite convinced," said Miss Lee, when I had finished. "But, oh! what a strange and terrible story! Do you know, Dr. Dunbrook, I always felt an antipathy to the man. I struggled against the feeling because I believed him to be my father. I also pitied him because of his supposed misfortunes. Mr. Burton had told me that he had once killed a man—he did not say whom—on very great provocation, and that he was always in mortal terror of being apprehended in consequence. Are you going to cremate him, according to your agreement?"

"Do you see any objection to it?"

"None whatever. Deal with him as you think proper."

"By the way, Miss Lee, he often spoke of you to me after that never-to-be-forgotten first interview between you; and, to do him justice, it was always in terms of the highest praise."

"Very good of him, I am sure, especially as he knew nothing about me."

"Remorse for his past crime may have had something to do with it; though that is scarcely an explanation. It is true he found me an interested listener, and he generally chose subjects of conversation which he thought would please me."

A slight, almost imperceptible blush was her only answer to this remark.

"Have you no relative alive, Miss Lee?" I asked after a pause.

"None. Mr. Burton is the only friend I have in the world."

"It would give me more pleasure than I can express if you would consent to reckon me as another friend."

The red upon her cheeks became more plainly visible.

"Thank you," she said; "I will. I always felt grateful for your kindness to that man when we both thought he was my father; and I now feel more than grateful for your straightforward honourable conduct since you discovered him to have been my father's murderer."

"Don't speak of my kindness to *him*," I said. "In that I only discharged the duties of my profession, for which I was well paid. You will no longer, of course, continue as a governess when this man's affairs are seen into, and you have obtained your rights?"

"I am not so sure about that," she replied. "I cannot easily live alone, and a life of idleness would be abhorrent to me."

"But still it would be somewhat of an anomaly for a lady



with an income of several hundreds a year to pursue the avocation of a governess."

"How do you know I shall be so rich?"

"I only conjecture it from the liberality with which *he* paid me for my visits."

"He knew he had not many months to live; so that he had no very strong motive for economy. I should not be surprised if he had dissipated all my father's money."

At that moment the conversation between us was interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Burton.

"Well, Miss Lee," he said, "I suppose I may take it for granted that Dr. Dunbrook has now told you all."

"All that I know," I said; "but possibly the papers left by him may reveal more."

"Dr. Dunbrook thinks," said Miss Lee, "that when the dead man's affairs are inquired into, I shall be put in possession of a fortune. Have *you* any grounds for thinking so?"

"It is quite possible, but by no means certain," he replied, "I know nothing of the scoundrel's affairs beyond the fact that he bought quite recently an annuity of £600 a year which he was paid through me, and which, of course, terminates with his life."

"Was my father very rich?" asked Miss Lee.

"Fairly so," he answered, "but nothing extraordinary. Unless his assassin economised the fruits of his crime—which I think unlikely—there may be very little left."

In my heart I could not help hoping this would be found to be the case. Till then I had somehow scarcely thought of Miss Lee's fortune at all; and now it presented itself to me for the first time, as a possible bar to my aspirations. To sue for Miss Lee's hand while she was a simple governess did not seem unreasonable; but for a poor doctor to venture upon such a step when she was rich and prosperous was quite another matter. She might, not unnaturally, think that I coveted her fortune and not herself.

"I hope my £120 a year is safe, at all events," said Miss Lee.

"Quite safe," replied Mr. Burton. "That annuity was settled upon your mother and yourself when you were a baby, in such a way that on your mother's death it all went to you. But speaking of your mother, Miss Lee, I have a present for you which I think you will appreciate."



He thereupon drew out of his pocket a small likeness in water-colours, and handed it to her.

"Is this my mother's likeness?" she asked, eagerly.

"It is," answered Mr. Burton, "I found it in hunting for some important papers which I had somehow mislaid."

"Is it like her?—like what she was?"

"Exactly."

She gazed at it long and earnestly. At last I ventured to ask if I might be favoured with a sight of it. She handed it to me at once.

"Why, Miss Lee," I said, "surely this is *your* likeness."

"Yes," she said, smiling, "since Mr. Burton has kindly given it to me."

"Yes, of course; but you know I don't mean that. Barring the dress and the arrangement of the hair, it is exactly like you in expression, features, everything."

"I thought the likeness would strike you," remarked Mr. Burton.

"That explains what the fellow said once in his delirium!" I exclaimed. "His words, if I recollect aright, were, '*She is his wife, and she thinks herself my daughter!*'"

"Well, I am glad you both find I am like my mother," said Miss Lee.

"Didn't you see the resemblance yourself?" I asked as I handed it back to her.

"I fancied I could detect some," she answered; "but the likeness did not strike me so forcibly as it appears to have done you."

"Ah! that's because you don't often look at yourself in the glass, and probably do not pay much attention to your image there when you do."

"As to that," she replied, "I dare say I am not very different from the generality of my sex. But, gentlemen, I must now leave you. I have my pupils' lessons to attend to. You will kindly let me know when you have examined that wicked man's papers."

"At that ceremony, Miss Lee, you should be present," said Mr. Burton. "I think it ought to be done to-morrow. But I will see you again before then and arrange as to the hour."

"For mercy's sake don't ask me to enter that dreadful room again! Surely *my* presence can be dispensed with. Please don't insist upon it."



"Very well, Miss Lee," he replied, "Dr. Dunbrook and I will act for you and let you know the result."

"Thank you both very much," she said. "I know my interests are perfectly safe in your hands. In fact I should only be in the way and bother you. If you want me to sign any papers, I can do it afterwards; but not where *he* is. Not there, not there."

## CHAPTER VI.

### MISS LEE'S DECISION.

THE following day Mr. Burton and I, in the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Higgins, as well as of two other witnesses whom I had brought with me, broke the seals and examined into Mr. Lee's affairs. In a small iron box we found £1809, Bank of England notes and sovereigns, with a roll of parchment on which was written as follows:

"I, George H. Lee, request Dr. Dunbrook of 45 High Street, Hilchester, to see that my body is cremated when I die, or, if he finds that impossible, that it is properly embalmed. If he sees that my body is cremated, I bequeath him one thousand pounds sterling of the money which I leave behind me. If it cannot be cremated and he sees that it is properly embalmed, I bequeath him five hundred pounds sterling. Whatever money is left after this bequest to Dr. Dunbrook I desire to be given to my daughter, Constance Louisa Lee, now a governess in the family of Mr. Henderson, 61 Cadogan Street, Hilchester.

"I desire, further, that this box and its contents be committed to the care of Dr. Dunbrook already mentioned, in whom I have the fullest confidence, and who will, I have no doubt, take care that the wishes which I have herein expressed shall be strictly executed.

"GEORGE H. LEE."

There was no date and no signatures of witnesses, so that the document had no legal validity whatever. The deceased had evidently meant it to be his final will and testament; but had put off till too late the disagreeable formalities which were necessary to render it effective.

"Well, Dr. Dunbrook, what do you propose doing now?" asked Mr. Burton afterwards, as our cab rattled through the streets towards his hotel.

"I can propose nothing till I see Miss Lee," I answered.

"And then I suppose you will propose marriage," he said laughing.



"Wait till we reach the hotel ; the cab makes such a confounded noise that we cannot hear each other speak," was my reply.

"I had heard what he had said well enough ; but I did not just then feel in the humour to listen to any light badinage about my feelings or intentions towards Miss Lee.

"Dr. Dunbrook," said the lawyer to me, as soon as we were alone in the sitting-room which he had engaged in the hotel, "I fancied that the little joke which I made just now about your proposing to Miss Lee was not quite acceptable to your feelings. If so, I regret it. Let me now speak to you upon the subject with all due seriousness. As matters stand at present I am in a sense Miss Lee's guardian ; at all events her trustee, and, yourself alone excepted, her only friend, I believe, in the world. Since I learnt from your own lips that you aspired to her hand, I have—as I think under the circumstances I had a right to do—made inquiries about your antecedents and character, and, I am glad to say, with the most satisfactory results. If therefore you now, or at any future time, propose marriage to her and she accepts you, I think it will be for your mutual happiness ; and I shall look upon such an event as a happy *dénouement* to this mysterious and not wholly cleared up villainy. My advice to you is to say nothing about the man's confession, upon which I shall also keep silent. If it were to get wind, Heaven only knows what legal difficulties and complications might spring up to bar Miss Lee from her rightful inheritance ! There, there, don't answer me ; I know the ways of the law ; and I am acting entirely in your interests. I will now go to see Miss Lee, to whom I will say everything that would be likely to dispose her in your favour—without of course hinting at your feelings—and then bring her here. The rest I leave to you. Good-bye," and off he went without even giving me the opportunity to make a reply. The cab which had brought us had, in obedience to his orders, waited for him at the door of the hotel. In that he went ; and in that, in less than twenty minutes, he returned with Miss Lee by his side. I had accompanied him to the outer door of the hotel, and was walking backwards and forwards just outside when the cab reappeared.

We all three walked into the private sitting-room already mentioned. We had no sooner entered and sat down than Mr. Burton requested me to explain all matters to Miss Lee in his absence, as he had to go out, and should not be back within half



an hour at least. To this, I of course, offered no opposition. Miss Lee seemed about to say something, but before she could get it out the lawyer was gone. I understood the motive of his action perfectly, and blessed him in my heart for it. Half an hour was a short space of time for the delicate task before me, but it might prove sufficient if I turned it to good account. I told her briefly (as I wanted to come quickly to other matters) that the deceased had only left £1809. I then gave her his will to read, informing her that it was the only written paper we had found, and that it had no legal value.

This she glanced over hurriedly and carelessly, and then handed back to me.

"It's pretty much as I had expected," she said, with a smile which did not betray a shade of disappointment; "the mighty fortune which I was to inherit is non-existent."

"How do you propose I should act?" I asked. "This will, as I have told you, is valueless: and even if it were otherwise, I have no moral claim to the money which it bequeaths to me. Every farthing of it belongs rightfully to you."

"That may be so or not," she replied, "but I will accept nothing till you have received your due share."

"Then, Miss Lee, you must accept all. Even if the will were valid, I could only claim the sum bequeathed to me on certain conditions; and those conditions I am no longer bound to fulfil."

"You mean about the cremating."

"Yes. When I made that promise to him, I believed him to be an upright and honourable man, and *your father*. A promise obtained under false pretences is no longer binding. Let the wretch be buried and put out of sight as soon as possible."

"As you like. I do not care how you dispose of him; but of the money left, more than half is rightfully yours, and you must take it."

"Well, we will see about that afterwards. Mr. Burton, when he comes, may have something to say in the matter. I now wish to talk to you about something else."

She looked up into my face inquiringly. She evidently had not the remotest suspicion of what was coming. This rather disconcerted me.

"Something quite different from what we have been talking about," I added, feeling my way cautiously, and with a nervous tremor in my voice, which I had not at all calculated upon.

Her quick ear detected this, and her womanly instinct took



instant alarm. The dark lustrous eyes fixed upon me quivered a little, but she did not withdraw them.

"I am afraid I shall offend you—or, at any rate, pain you," I said.

"I know you would not willingly do either, Dr. Dunbrook."

The tone was soft and gentle, and not without emotion. This encouraged me.

"I understood you to say, Miss Lee, that you had no relatives alive."

"Distant ones whom I have never seen, and who are nothing to me. Mr. Burton, who is no relative, is the only real friend I have in the world."

"Not quite. You promised you would look upon me as another."

"I beg your pardon; so I did. But Mr. Burton is a very *old* friend, while you are—"

"A comparatively young one," I said, gathering courage from her hesitation.

"I was not going to say quite that," she replied. "I was thinking not so much of age as of length of acquaintance. I have known Mr. Burton a much longer time than I have you."

This beating about the bush seemed to be removing me further and further from the point which I wanted to reach. The minutes were passing and the old lawyer might be back before I could unburden my heart of the load which oppressed it. So I made up my mind to take a more direct course.

"Miss Lee," I said, "I am an awkward blunderer and cannot get out what I really want to say. I hope you won't be offended if I tell you that I have ventured to aspire to more than your friendship—that in short," I continued hurriedly and nervously, "I should esteem myself the happiest of men if you would consent to be my wife."

In a moment her face became crimson and her eyes sought the floor.

Was she mortally offended? I could not tell. She remained silent and gave no sign.

"Forgive me," I said, "and end my suspense quickly."

Then she looked up. Her eyes glistened with moisture.

"Don't speak of forgiveness, Dr. Dunbrook," she said, "I feel that you have done me an honour and I thank you. But I was not at all prepared for this and do not know how to answer you.



I hope you will believe me, when I assure you that I would not willingly give you pain."

My heart sank at those words.

"I know you would not," I replied; "but do let me know the worst. Perhaps your hand is already engaged?"

"No," she said, "it is not."

"Nor your affections?"

"Neither. The thought of marriage—at least as a possibility in my own case—never occurred to me. The stain and mystery hanging over my parentage I always looked upon as an insuperable bar. The stain is now removed and the mystery cleared up, but the feelings natural to my sex, and without which no woman should give her hand in marriage, are, I am afraid, dead through long repression. If I thought it right to marry, there is no man I know to whom I would more willingly entrust my happiness than to yourself; but—it pains me to say it—it cannot be."

She held out her hand to me, while the tears which had been long gathering in her eyes rolled down her cheeks.

\* \* \* \*

What remains I will relate very briefly. Miss Lee upon that occasion refused me—very gently and feelingly, but still decidedly. She was firm upon another point also; she would not accept a penny more than the amount which she considered her share of the money left by the man who had passed himself off as her father.

Mr. Burton's arguments upon the point had no more effect upon her than mine. The deceased's wishes, little as he deserved it, were carried out to the letter. I saw that he was duly cremated, and pocketed the £1000 recompense for this which he had bequeathed to me. The mystery attaching to his identity we did not make public. To have done so would have answered no useful purpose and might have done harm in more ways than one.

Nothing more was heard of the paragraph in the Australian paper which had so alarmed the wretched man's guilty conscience.

To end my story, I have only to add that Miss Lee's refusal was not final. By degrees her resolution never to marry was overcome by my perseverance. The esteem and friendship which she always entertained for me gradually developed into a warmer feeling, and in about a year's time she accepted me as her husband.



## TWO IRISH STORIES.

## I.

## PHELIM'S PUNISHMENT.

## CHAPTER I.

YOU may well say it was pinince, for sorra greater pinince ever Father Reilly ever put an me at home in Ireland ever came up to it ! I was thinking in me own mind that whin I came t' London that I'd manage to escape too heavy a pinince wid a sthrange priest ; and bedad I must now confess to you, miss, that I'd sooner, any day, have pinince from a reg'lar priest, nor from me masther, Misther Standish Blake.

This is how it was, miss ; the Blakes is as poor as any raal ginthry in all Ireland ! But they're the raal good'ould style, an' no matther whether they can pay for it or not, they always have whatever takes their fancy. Well, shure one day Misther Standish comes t' me in great glee, an' sez he—

"Phelim," sez he, "I've grand news entirely for yeh ! yeh know I'm goin' to be a Counsellor ?"

"I know, Masther Standish."

"An'," sez he, "what d'ye think ? my uncle Peter is goin' to pay for me to go over and eat my dinners in London."

"More power to him," sez I ; "but couldn't yeh get a good dinner in Ireland ?"

"Yeh don' undherstand it," he sez, "it's a way ov sayin' that I'm goin' to be med a barrister, or, as we call it here, a counsellor. So I'm goin' over to London, an' as my uncle wants me to do the thing in grand style, an' to be a credit to the blood of the Blakes, he says he'll pay for a servant for me, so I want to know if you'll come with me."

"Never say it twict, sir," sez I, an' bedad ! me heart was up in me hat at the thought at goin' to London !

I wint home, an' I tould the ould mother, an' I proomised to



sind her the rint home be every gale day, an' while we war talkin' who comes in but purty Biddy Cassidy. Now, Biddy an' me was pullin' a coard for a while past, an' whin I seen her come in wid her purty face an' her purty figure—I felt she was the brakin's ov me heart entirely, an' that I'd be very sorry to lave her.

"Did yeh hear the grand news, Biddy?" sez me mother. "Shure, Phelim's goin' off t' London, wid Masther Standish! Why, he'll come back such a gintleman, an' be spakin' such beautofil English that we won't know him!"

"Whisht, now, mother," sez I, for I seen Biddy get a bit pale, an' she said nothing, "I'm not such a haythen Turk as to forget me own people! I'll come back just the same, barrin' dacint clothes, an' a few pounds in me pocket!"

I walked home wid Biddy, an' just as were at the stile near her father's boreen I put me arm round her waist an', sez I—

Ccme I won't tell what I said, or what she said, but anyhow we understood aich other, an' she promised she wouldn't look at a boy while I was away, an' I proomised I wouldn't look at a girl, no more nor Saint Kevin did; and afther a little comfortable coorting, I left her at the doore.

Over Misther Standish an' me kem to London: an' a fine town it is for the size ov it! why it's as big as twinty Galways, or tin Dublins. But it's not as sociable as Ireland. Sorra a fair or a dacint wake in the whole av it! An' the quare way the people have av livin' in some parts av it! There's what they call "Flats," where a whole lot av people live in the same big house. Me and Misther Standish had a little bit av a flat—but bedad! little as it was there's many's the big bit av fun there used to be in it! Misther Standish, too, hired a dacint woman, that was a grand cook, her name was "Emma," but as impident as the devil! She an' me couldn't get on at all. She was always abusin' the Irish, an' me blood used to get up whin she'd been too inquisitive about Misther Standish's income. Misther Standish used to give me many a good scoldin' for noot keepin' a still tongue in me head; an' wan day he tould me that if I sed wan word about the ould tumble-down Castle at home at Bally-bogna-slatthery, that he'd pay me passage an' sind me back that day!

In the next flat to us—it was twict as big as ours—there lived wan Colonel Norton an' his purty daughter. Av coorse, like the thrue Irishman he was, Masther Standish had an eye for a purty girl, an' he an' Miss Norton got to be grate friends. The ould



Colonel didn't keep a man, an' sometimes, he used t' get me to polish up his ould acouthrements for him; an' thin—I think he seen what was goin' on betchune his daughter an' Misther Standish—he used to be askin' me what soart av a place Bally-bogna-slatthery Castle was, an' I used to swear there wasn't the like av it in England, estate, tinnints an' all—huntin' an' fishin' bawns an' boreens,—an' shure I tould no lie to him when I said yeh wouldn't match it in England.

But somehow or other, I must have said something I didn't mean t' say—without thinkin', av coorse—for wan evenin' Misther Standish comes in afther bein' at the Colonel's, an' he was in a thunderin' passion.

"Tell me," he sez, "what was it yeh were tellin' the Colonel about Bally-bogna-slatthery?"

"Praised it up to the skies!" sez I.

"Aye," sez he, "did you ever hear av anything bein' so praised that people become suspicious about it? That's what you've done. Now keep your tongue more between yer teeth the next time the Colonel comes askin' yeh questions."

The next moment Misther Standish got a lot av letthers—he was always gittin' letthers—an' whin he read one av thim he jumped up an' gev a "Tally-ho" that ye'd think the Red Rover was in sight an' the hounds in full cry after him.

"Arrah," sez I, "what's the matther?"

"Matther," sez he, "why, only that—but no," he sez, stoppin' short, "if I tould yeh, an' the ould Colonel got hould av yeh, yeh couldn't hould that onaisy tongue av yours, an' I want to be the wan to tell the first av the good news meself."

"Pon my conscience, Misther Standish," sez I, "I won't tell any wan if you'll only tell me the good news. Shure, who has a better right t'know it first nor wan of yer own?" I was dyin' av curiosity!

"Well, here's for it," he sez. "We've won the lawsuit that was goin' on for years, an I've come in for the Knockmafad Estate."

Yeh might have knocked me down with a feather! But the next minute I gave a "View Halloo" aigual to Misther Standish's 'Tally-ho,' for the Knockmafad Estate was the finest in the County Mayo.

"Hould yer tongue, yeh omadhaun! some wan 'll hear yeh an' think I'm horsewhippin' yeh, may be."

"Sorra hair I care, Sir! An' how soon will we be goin' back to the ould counthrv?"



"How the divil can I tell?" he sez; "I've to go down now to Lincoln's Inn to see Twistem and Tapean about it."

"Mayn't I tell Emma about it, sir?" sez I; "for faith, I think I'll go out av me skin wid joy."

"No!" he roars at me. "Don't say a word to any wan. Here give me a dhrop av that poteen that's in the canteen. Take a dhrop yerself, Phelim," he sez, "an' see here," he sez, laughin', "I'm afraid yeh can't keep a still tongue in your head, so to get off the steam, if any wan comes in while I'm away—(mind yeh don't leave this room)—an' asks yeh a question, say nothin', but 'The real unlicensed, unchristened Irish dew—Poteen, that never blushed at the sight of a gauger.' Mind you put it up, and don't make a beast of yourself dhrinkin' any more," an' off he wint.

However, I knew Mither Standish was the right soart, an' that he wouldn't mind me takin' another thimbleful to wish good luck to us both, an' just as I was takin' it, who comes in but Emma, with her bonnet an' shawl on. I med haste an' locked up the poteen, an' she sez very cute:

"What's that yer lockin' up, Phelim?"

"The raal unlicensed, unchristened Irish dew, that never blushed at the sight of a gauger—Poteen!"

"Well," sez she wid a sniff—I think she thought she'd get a dhrop av the precious liquor—"I hope you an' your master had it airley enough in the mornin'. I'm goin' out to market, so stay here, if any wan should call, to open the door." An' away wint Emma.

## CHAPTER II.

There was wan thing an' another to be done. I had to brush Mither Standish's clothes, an' see after his evening dress-shirt, an' I was thinkin', av goin' out to "The Barristher's Arms" for a pot of stout an' mild, whin I seen Emma commin' across the sthreet, an' some sthrange girl runnin' after her. May I never sin, but it's as thrue as that God med little apples, an' that Eve ate them, whin I say, that the sight nearly left me eyes whin I saw that the girsha was—the divil a wan else—but Biddy Cassidy!

I was av course just goin' to run down an' to welcome Biddy, for I was in that state of flustration I didn't know what t' do. What cud bring Biddy t' London at all? I cudn't make head



nor tail av it ; so I was boultin' down the stairs—whin ! all av a suddint—I bethought av the pinince Misther Standish put on me !

I run back into the room, lavin' the doore wide open ; bedad I hurd them comin' up the stairs, an' och ! the curse av Moll Kelly light an' her, I hurd Emma sayin'—

"There's the door open, so I suppose either Misther Blake or his man is in."

In the name of every Saint that ever wore a crown o' glory what was I t' do ? I wouldn't brake me word t' Misther Standish, an' here was Biddy near in the room wid me. I known that if I seen her it was all over wid me, for she was the brakin's of me heart intirely ; why, I was that fond av her that I'd live on the clippin's av tin wid her, an' think it very nourishing to the heart at the same time. But, as I said, they were near in the room, so I looked round t' see if I cud hide anywhere, an' bedad the only place was anundher the table, an' it was covered wid an illigant big green baize cloth ! Down I wint on me hands an' knees, an' crawled anundher the table. I was hardly anundher it, whin I hurd Emma sayin'—

"There's no wan there ! but as the door's open Phelim can't be far away."

"Och," sez poor innocent Bridget, "I wondher his own heart doesn't tell him I'm in London !"

"All the leedies does seem very fond av Phelim," sez Emma, wid a soart av a sniff. "He's a very agreeable man intirely ; indeed, he makes love to every girl he come across !"

Now that was as big a lie as ever Emma let out av her, an that's sayin' a good dale. I was very near brakin' through me pinince, only she wint away, an' banged the doore, an' there I was anundher the table, an' not able to say wan word t' the girl of me heart, an' she only a few feet away from me. All at wanst she began t' talk to herself. She was lonely, the cratheer, an' its a relief to a woman t' keep her tongue graised, in case she'd want t' use it all av a suddint an' the words mightn't come handy ; an' she says—

"Throth ! it's a grand room all out ! Sofas, an' arm-chairs, an' books, an' pictures, an' a piano, an' all soarts av grandheur och-hone ! Sure, it's no wonder Phelim forgot me among all these grand things ! It's a mighty differ betchune where he is now, an' where he kem from !" an' sez I in me own mind—

"Right yeh are, Biddy, for I never was put anundher a table t' do pinince in the whole coorse av me life afore !"



"That's a fine bit av flannel," sez Biddy afther a bit, an' I was wondherin' where was the flannen, for the sorra bit I knewn av in the whole place but some flannen cricket-shirts av Misther Standish's, an' his vests, an' me own two coloured shirts.

"It's a purty bit, entirely," sez Biddy, an' I hurd her comin' over to the table, an' what d'ye think, but she takes a houl't av the green cover that was on it, an' as she does so she gives a screech, for I was so flustered I cudn't help movin' me legs, an' out they stuck beyant the ind av the table. In a jiffy she whipped up the cloth, an' why—there I was!

"Phelim!" she schreeches wid joy, an' clappin' her hands, "Phelim, avick! an' didn't yeh know I was here? an' why didn't yeh come to me? Och! Phelim! what's the matter? Why are yeh shuttin' your eyes up tight that a-way? Aw why don't yeh come up out av that?"

I was near gone mad at not knowin' what to do. I opened the corner av me eye an' looked up; but I shut it up quick enough agin, for Biddy looked that purty!

"What brought yeh there?" she sez; but the sorra word I said.

"What brought yeh there anundher the table," she schreeches, she was that wild.

"What's the matter?" sez Emma, comin' runnin' in from hearing the schreech. "Oh!"—whin she seen me, lyin' on the broad of me back wid me eyes shut—"is that the state he's in this hour av the morning?"

"Shure he's not drunk?" sez Bridget in a fright.

"Don't ye see he is," said that sarpint Emma—yeh see I wouldn't be coortin' her at all, an' she was that mad! "What brings yeh lyin' there?"

I felt I'd burst av I didn't say something, so I remimbered what Mister Standish tould me t'say whin I found I had to say something, so I ses—

"The raal, unlicensed, unchristened Irish dew, that never blushed at the sight of a gauger—Poteen!"

"He's dhrunk!" sez Emma, givin' me the weight of her heavy fut an' me shins.

"He's not," sez Bridget, the darlin' standin' up for me.

"He is," sez Emma. "But I'll know what I'll do—I'll call the Colonel."

Away she goes, an' poor Bridget sits down on the carpet, an' looks at me wid all the eyes she had, an' bursts out cryin'.



"Oh, Phelim! Phelim! that ever I'd see this day! To come all the way from Bally-bogna-slattherry an' to find you makin' suchna baste av yourself! Can yeh even stand up?"

I wanted to show I wasn't quite overtook altogether, so I jumped up, an' she jumped up too, an' med a grab at me. But I was too quick for her, an' I put the table betchune us, the very minute that Emma, an' the Colonel, an' his purty daughter kem into the room.

"Come, come! what's this all about?" says the ould Colonel. "My good man, how does it happen you are found in Mr. Blake's rooms under such very mysterious circumstances; explain yourself!"

I wanted to tell him that I'd do so wid all the veins av me heart, only I cudn't bekase av the pinince. So I shook me head an' I opened me mouth, an' I pinte down my throat wid me finger.

"What is the reason you cannot speak to us?" sez the purty young lady. She looked that disthressed that as I always had a soft spot in me heart for the women, I felt I had to spake, an' make her mind aisy, so I sez—

"The raal, unlicensed, unchristened Irish dew, that never blushed at the sight av a gauger—Poteen!"

"What is Poteen?" sez the poor innocent, ignorant young crathur.

"Whisky, miss," sez Biddy. "Whisky that does be med unknownst, an' I suppose Misther Standish, like the 'cute boy he is, got houl't av some! I wouldn't wondher if they had it for breakfast instid av tay or good nathral stirabout an' milk—had yeh, ye drunken omadhaun?" sez Biddy in a passion, an' stampin' her foot at me.

"The raal, unlicensed, unchristened Irish dew, that never blushed at the sight av a gauger—Poteen!"

"I don't believe a word of it," sed the purty young lady; "but"—an' she turns an' looks at Biddy very sharp—"my good girl, who are you?"

"Yes! Yes!" sez the ould Colonel, "you are a very mysterious person—we have never seen you before; where have you come from?"

"Come, now, me ould gintleman," sez Bridget, feeling the blood av the Cassidys risin' ithin her, "don't call me names! I won't stand it! Aw only knows Phelim there is blind drunk—yeh are!" she shouts, bekase I nodded me head—"yeh know yeh



are! 'An only yeh are yeh wouldn't stand by an' hear me called bad names—ah! it's not Barney Egan that's in it! He's the boy that 'ud put daylight athrough any wan that 'ud call me bad names."

"My father only said you were a mysterious person," sed the purty young lady, "and we must continue to think so until we know who you are."

"I'm not ashamed av who I am or where I kəm from," sez Biddy. "I'm a poor orphint girl from hust wan side av Bally-bogna-slatthery near the Blake's Castle."

"Oh!" sez the old gintleman; "then you can tell us about Mr. Blake's castle in Ireland."

"Shure it's a quare soart oav a castle it is," sez Bridget; "shure the half of the windys is boorded up, an' the Blakes haven't as much as 'ud jingle an' a mile stone. I say," an' she shouted at me agin, "may be yeh can tell us where Misther Standish does get the money for all the grandeur I see here."

"Constance," sez the ould Colonel, "I am beginning to think there is a good deal of truth in what this very intelligent woman says, and——"

"There now," sez Biddy again, "there's more av yer names! I tell yeh, Phelim, it's not Barney Egan that 'ud stand by an' hear me belied an' called names. Och! Why was I foolish—why didn't I stay at home wid him, an' he now wid five stall-feds, an' a sow and nine boneens that yeh wouldn't see the match av thim in the counthry!"

Red-headed Barney Egan! To think Bridget 'ud think av him for a minnit was enough to make me forget me promise to Misther Standish.

"I kem over," sez Biddy, "bekase me poor father—God rest his sowl!—was berried last Sunday was three weeks. An' whin he was dyin' sez he to me, an' Father Valley was listenin', 'Bridget,' sez he, 'whin I'm gone, you'll have no wan to look afther yeh; an' that's a bad thing for a young girl. So—as I know you and Phelim is pullin' a coard, an' he's a dacint boy, just sell the few bits av things, an' there's seven pound tin and fourpence in the tick anundher me—right in the middle av the chaff,—yeh see what a clivir soart av a man me poor father was—'so take it all, an' go to London, an' Phelim is not the boy he was if he doesn't marry yeh off hand.' So after the funeral—an' a fine wake we had! there wasn't a nicer funeral in the place for many a day—I did what the poor father tould me; and now whin I come I find



Phelim blind drunk! an' oh, I'm the unfortunate girl! I'll go straight home in the next cattle-boat, for that'll be cheaper, an' I'll marry Barney Egan—so I will!"

I was near mad whin the door was opened, an' in walks Misther Standish; an' he looks first at wan an' then at another, an' he sez in a wondher—

"What the mischief is the matter?"

"Matter enough!" sez the ould Colonel. "This woman has come from your part of the country and she has been telling us some very extraordinary things respecting your family residence, Mr. Blake."

"What!" exclaims Misther Standish. "By all that's beautiful, an that's herself, if this isn't Biddy Cassidy from Ballybogna-slaterry!"

"Yes, it's me, Misther Standish; I kem all the way from Ireland in a cattle-boat afther me poor ould father died, to look for Phelim, an' now I find him dead drunk, and not able to say anything, but something about Poteen."

Misther Standish looked at me: an' I looked at Misther Standish, and we both roared laughin'.

Then Misther Standish puts his arm round Biddy and he gives her a good kiss, an' he pushes her over t' me, an' thin tells all about why he put the pinince on me, an' sez he—

"I've got it at last! Old Twistem an' Tapean have the business nearly settled, and, please God, we'll all meet next Christmas in dear old Ireland."

"Hurrah!" sez I, an' it was the first word I said afther Misther Standish's pinince on me. "Hurrah! we'll have a double weddin' for—"

"Phelim," sez Master Standish, "hold your tongue!"

"I will, sir, afther I say this; that 'pon me conscience Bridget is the gainer by me pinince to the last day av her life. I often hear it said that women oughtn't t' be let talk so much, but, bedad! it's such a terrible thing to have to keep one's tongue quiet an' one burstin' to talk, that she may give me the lingsh and breadth av her tongue every night, noon, an' morning, an' the sorra bit av me cud have the heart, t' say a word agin it. Ah, no! as the blessed Saint Patrick said in wan av his sarmons, 'A fellow feeling' makes us powerful kind,' and thim's me own feelins down to the ground."



## II.

## SAINT PATRICK'S PENANCE.

## CHAPTER I.

THERE are a good many steps to mount up before you get to the top of the ruined belfry of the once famous Abbey on the Hill of Slane in the County Meath. Many a time in days gone by have we toiled up the narrow spiral stone steps ; but then, having reached the summit, what a landscape lies before the beholder ! Round the base of the belfry lies the churchyard, with its humble graves, rude headstones, and old, grey flat tombstones ; amongst them being one of brass, said to have been placed over the tomb of Slanius, a foreign prince who came over and settled in Meath and from whom the village of Slane takes its name. Another legend says it is the tomb of a French prince who had been sent over to be educated by the pious and learned monks of Slane Priory. The landscape, with its vivid green pasturage and occasional woods, slopes gently down to where the picturesque little village lies almost embowered in trees. Thence it slopes downwards again until the valley of the "beauteous and silvery" Boyne is reached ; and by the side of the Boyne are the ruins of the once famous Hermitage of Saint Erc. The latter, in the ancient annals of Ireland, is called "The sweet-spoken judge." He was the first Bishop of Slane, and was consecrated by Saint Patrick, who thus eulogises him in the following strain—

## BISHOP ERC.

"Everything he adjudged was just,  
Every one that passes a just judgment  
Shall receive the blessing of Saint Erc."

Saint Erc was the nephew of Saint Patrick, and the latter is said to have often stayed at the Hermitage. Be that as it may, there is certainly a tradition that, at all events, he stayed there upon one occasion, and crossed the river on Christmas Day to celebrate mass for the monks of Fennor.



A more sleepy, superstition-ridden place than Slane is, it would be difficult to find in the three Kingdoms. The efficacy of water from holy wells and the belief in charms are articles of faith in the district. Many a "pattern" and "station" have we witnessed at the Holy Well of Slane, which is situated in the greensward, just beside the Hermitage of Saint Erc, where lies the scene of our story.

At the opposite side of the Boyne, right in view of the Hermitage, there stands, or stood, in my early days, a small comfortable cabin, tenanted by Lukey Maguire, the lock-keeper of the canal. His wife, Peggy Maguire, was a bustling 'sonsy woman, with a sharp tongue and a very good notion of using it; whereas Lukey was a gaunt, lanky man, rather taciturn, save when a glass of whisky inspired him. Under the influence of the spirit it was his great delight at such times to gather around him an audience seated upon the arms of the lock, and there to dilate upon the ancient grandeur of the three monasteries of Slane, viz., the one on the Hill, the Hermitage of Saint Erc, and the old Abbey of Fennor; the latter being situated upon a gently-sloping green eminence to the right of Lukey's cottage.

It was Saint Patrick's Day, and Lukey had just closed the lock, after having admitted into its friendly haven a lighter from Drogheda laden with coal; for in such wise was our fuel provided, save when we could procure turf from the neighbouring bog of Horsestown below the Castle Road. Lukey and the two lightermen sat upon the arms of the lock, smoking the pipe of peace in company with Joe Wetheral, the miller, and Peter Nady, the priest's boy. The society of the latter was much sought after at rural gatherings, for Peter could serve Mass in Latin—which, by the way, he did not understand—and was generally considered grand company.

"D'ye mane t' tell me up to me face that Saint Patherick never was stayin' at the Hermitage down there!" exclaimed Peter Nady menacingly, addressing the miller, who had presumed to cast a doubt upon the tradition.

"Now, aisy, Peter! Shure no one could tell for sartin—I don't suppose there was directheries in them days!"

"Arrah, men dear! an' what are ye fightin' about?" inquired Mrs. Maguire, making her appearance at the door of the cottage, followed by Mrs. Wetheral, who had come over with her husband in order to have a friendly gossip.



"No fightin' at all, Mrs. Maguire, only I'm tellin' Peter that how can he say for sartin' that Saint Patherick ever was stayin' up at the ould Hermitage there beyant wid Saint Erc."

"See here, now," interposed Peter Nady, "Lukey is in the right av it; an' only I don't want t' take the wind out of his sails, an' t' tell the story meself, I'd tell you a raal throe story that his Rivrence sez might or might not be throe."

"Oh! bedad! Pether, let us have it!" exclaimed Lukey affably, "shure I can tell yeh *my* story afther."

"I'll tell you what you'll all do," advised Mrs. Maguire. "It's beginnin' to feel cowl'd now, so come in, there's a roarin' fire within, an' have a glass of somethin' comfortable, an' Pether'll tell us the story—for throth! I'd like meself t' hear it."

Soon they were all seated around the comfortable hearth, Peter being accommodated with the seat of honour upon the settle-bed in the warmest corner near the fire. The company were supplied with punch, which, as glasses were conspicuous by their absence, they drank from tea-cups or egg-cups or any other receptacle which came handy.

"Now, Pether," said Mrs. Maguire, "let us have the story. But first fill up yer cup, man—talkin's dhry work."

"I will, ma'am," and Peter's cup having been replenished with a stiff glass of punch, he commenced as follows:—

"Well—nabours—yeh must know that wan Christmas whin Saint Erc was livin' up there at the Hermitage he was asked t' go an' give the rites to a poor woman that was dyin' up there near Ardmulchan. As good luck would have it, who was stayin' on a visit wid him that very Christmas but his uncle Saint Patherick!"

"'Yeh must go, av coorse,' says Saint Patherick, 'an' as yeh promised t' go an' say airly Mass there beyant at Fennor, I'll go meself instead of yeh.'

"The next mornin' they were up airly, for Saint Patherick wanted to say a mouthful av prayers himself afore he wint to sarve Mass. Well Saint Erc had a boy—the same as it might be meself, yeh know—an' this boy—his name was Barney—used to sarve Mass. So Saint Patherick wint down to the kitchin to call him, an'—sorra lie I'm tillin'—whin I say he saw the fellow makin' a mortial heavy breakfast av oaten male stirabout an' buttermilk.

"'Yeh gluttonous abnormal son av a woman!' says the Saint in a tarin' passion, 'don't yeh know yeh ought to sarve Mass on



an empty stomach! I can't take yeh wid me now! So just stay here until I come back, an' keep sayin' all the prayers yeh know, or the sorra bit of roast goose will yeh git on this blessed Christmas Day!

"'Aw! yer Rivirince,' he roars out, 'don't say yeh won't take me across in the coracle \* wid yeh! Shure what 'd the nabours say av yeh hadn't yer own boy wid yeh?'

"'I don' care for what any one sez,' sez the Saint, 'I only think av doin' me duty; so here yeh stay, an' what's more, I'll put a pinin' an' yeh, so don't spake t' any one that comes to the doore while I'm away, but get the dinner ready, an' av yeh break the pinin', I'll root yeh be the side av the Boyne an' every hair on yer head'll grow into a bulrush;' an' wid that Saint Patherick struck his mithre on his head, and tuk his crozier in his hand an' banged the doore afther him, an' aff he wint to the coracle that was waitin' at the side of the Boyne.

"Saint Patherick was a little bit flustered, an' he wasn't thinkin' what he was doin', so his foot slipped as he was gettin' into the coracle an' he fell into the Boyne: an' his mithre floated wan way, an' his crozier the other way, an' there he was roarin' 'Miwiellia murdher,' an' at last he managed to ketch them, an' he wint back to the Hermitage an' got dhry vestments, for he was all wet wid th' wather.

"Av coorse, all this delay goin' backwards an' forwards med Saint Patherick late, an' what was his wonderment whin he got to the chapel, but to see that no wan tuk a bit av notice av him, or gev him the time av day:—an' the sight nearly left his eyes when he saw some one—the very moral av himself—sayin' Mass at the althar! He was put out for a minit, but sure enough, he seen how it all was! So, puttin' his hand in his pocket he pulls out an ould soda-water bottle full av holy wather from his own holy well, an' he walks up th' chapel an' he throws it over the chap at the althar!

"Well, bedad! There was such a ruction as yeh never heerd tell av! Saint Patherick was the cutest Saint goin' them days: an' the minit he threwn the holy wather over the fellow, he gev a schreech that yeh cud hear all over the parish, an' his horns grew up an' his tail grew down, an' he vanished in a flash of lightenin'—for not a lie I'm tellin' whin I say that it was the

\* A wicker boat covered with hide. There is one of these primitive boats in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.



Devil, that's always on the look-out to circumnambulate every one—that pertinded to be the Saint!

"The whole congregation was frightened, for the Devil gev them his blessin', an' we know the Devil's blessin' always turns to a curse! but Saint Patherick towld them not to be onaisy, for, sez he, 'his curse nor his blessin' wouldn't do yeh any good nor harm, for, yeh see, he hasn't the unction.'"

## CHAPTER II.

"Well, whin Mass was over, Saint Patherick thought he might as well be gettin' back to the Hermitage, for he was beginnin' to feel a bit hungry; an' afther wishin' every one a Happy Christmas, off he goes down to where the coracle was waitin' for him be the side av the river. Just as the Saint was steppin' into the coracle he heerd a schreech, an' av coorse it was only nathral for him to look round, an' there on the bank he saw standin' wan av the purtiest little girshas that ever yeh seen! She had blue eyes, an' long goold curls, an' the purtiest, weeniest, whitest little feet ever yeh seen, an afore the Saint had time to say wan word to her she calls out:

"'Oh, Saint dear, I've run all the way from the chapel afther yeh an' I thought I'd never catch yeh! Won't yeh take me across the Boyne wid yeh in yer coracle?'

"The Saint was regular flustered, an' he didn't know what t' think at all. All at wanst it kem into his mind that it was the Devil himself again that kem in a new shape; an' he rimimbered how the Devil bamboozled even Saint Anthony, so he sez:

"'Be aff now, me ould gintleman, I seen enough av yer goin's on to-day. Don't think I'm goin' to be taken in again by yeh! Begone now,' and he was pushin' the coracle away from the bank, whin she stooped down and caught houl't av it, an' bedad! in she jumped!

"Bedad, the Saint didn't know what t' do. She sat down an' she sez:

"'Don't turn me out, Saint dear. I want to go over an' see a poor craythur there beyant that's in a desp'rate way.'

"'What!' sez the Saint, for he was very soft-hearted. 'D' ye want t' go t' see any one that's very bad?'



" 'Yeh never said a thruer word, Saint dear! the crathur is bad, very bad, an' I'm the only wan in the world that can do the craythur any good.'

" 'Well, that's quare ; I don't know av any wan near us bein' very bad, exceptin' Flan Mor's wife, an' she got the sacrimints this mornin'.'

" 'Oh, it isn't her, Saint, dear. But here we are at the bank, and throth I'm hungry.'

" Here the poor Saint was in another puzzle. It was agin the rule to let a woman into the Hermitage, an' here was as purty a girl as yeh cud see, thinkin', maybe, that she'd be axed t' stay an' have her dipner.

" 'We don't let wimin into the Monasthery,' he sez, thryin' to keep from lookin' at her purty blue eyes, for he rimimbered how Kathleen had put the comedher upon a comrade saint av his in the County Wicklow, be the name av Saint Kivin. 'However,' he sez, as he tied the coracle wid a suggan\* to the stump av an ould three, 'just come up an' wait outside av the gate, an' I'll see what can be done.'

" Well, now, it was quare, but Saint Patherick didn't like to tell any av the monks about his havin' brought a purty girl across the Boyne wid him in his coracle, an' at the same time he wanted t' give her something to ait. Ould Brother Dominic was the head cook, an' he thought av tellin' him, for he minded that the very last time Brother Dominic kem t' confession t' him that he tould him—well, I'm not right in saying anything about it—I'll only say this, that Saint Patherick didn't care to put temptation in Brother Dominic's way, an' just as he was thinkin' in his own mind about it, who does he come across but Barney!

" For a minnit the Saint forgot the pinince he put an poor Barney ; an' the next minnit he thought that if he tuk aff the pinince, an' got Barney t' help him about the purty girl, that he'd just keep his tongue in his cheek an' not go gossipin' about her, so he goes t' him an he sez :

" 'Barney,' sez Saint Patherick, 'yer not good for much, but maybe yeh can help a poor craythur that's in desp'rate trouble ; an' if you can, I'll let yeh aff the pinince. But, whisht now !' he sez, for Barney was cuttin' a caper wid delight, 'I must tell yeh all about it ; it's a serious business,' sez he, 'for the crather is—a woman !'

\* Suggan—a hay rope.



"Well, Barney listened wid all the ears he had, but av coarse he cud say nothin'.

"The craythur follied the corrace, sez Saint Patherick, 'an it was only a Christian act for me t' take her in, an' take her across the Boyne, for she said she wanted t' come an' see a poor craythur that was dyin'. Now, d' you know any wan that's in ridiculous morbis this minute? Yis, yeh may answer the question.'

"I don't, yer Rivirince—I never heerd av such a disaise,' sez Barney; 'ould Brother Festus has Saint Anthony's fire in his face: an' three childher there beyant at Higgins Town has the mazles, but I haven't heerd av anywan havin' ridiculus morbis.'

"Yeh omadhaun!' shouts Saint Patherick—for I heerd that for all he *was* a Saint, he had a short timper—'have yeh been sarvin' Latin all this time an' don't know that ridiculus morbis \* manes in the article of death—dyin'?'

"I don't know anywan, yer Rivirince. It's a fine healthy saison—God bless it!

"It's a poor parish can't afford a clerk, so I say amen to that!' sez the Saint; 'but bedad things is very bad, there's no burial fees, nor marriage dues, nor nothin' goin' on. However, I lift that poor craythur av a woman outside the gates, an' as I see it's comin' on t' rain, yeh might ask her in t' sit in the porch, an' give her somethin' t' ait, an' find out from her who this poor dyin' crathur is.'

"Well, me brave Barney, nothin' loth, wint aff, an' Saint Patherick sat down to his writin', for the monks used to do a lot av writin' in them days, for printin' wasn't chape like it is now. He had a little bell on the table beside him, an' more—betoken that very bell † is in a curiosity place now—so wondherin' that Barney didn't come t' consult him about the wine for dinner—for he kept the kay av the cellar himself—Saint Patherick rang the bell, but no Barney came. The Saint rang it again:—he rang it the third time—but no Barney appeared.

"Bedad, the Saint cudn't think what was the matther! Barney never disobeyed that bell before: an' the Saint knew there wasn't another bell within the baw av an ass, so sez he t' himself:—

\* Probably the Saint meant *in articulo mortis*.—ED.

† Saint Patrick's Bell, with its old leathern covering, is in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. Saint Patrick is said to have cast it himself for the purpose of warding off evil spirits.



"'I'll just put the finishin' touches to Saint Pether's breeches, an' begin a new crown for King Solomon: an' then I'll look after Barney.'

"The good Saint was so busy that he didn't feel the time passin': an' then he began to feel mortal hungry. At the same time he found himself thinkin' about that purty girl, an' he kept wondherin' if Barney found out who was the poor sick crathur she kem across the Boyne to see. An' then the Saint rang the bell again, an' shure it was enough t' vex even a Saint whin nō Barney med his appearance!

"Up gets Saint Patherick an' down he goes to the kitchen; but the sorra wan was there but two lay brothers: wan av them was lardin' a turkey an' the other was washin' the cabbage; but the divil a bit av Barney was to be seen.

"'Where's that thief av the world, Barney?' sez Saint Patherick.

"'He was here about two hours ago,' sez ould Brother Pontifactus, he that was washin' the cabbage.

"'Yes!' sez Brother Diaphragmatus, that was lardin' the turkey, 'an' he wint aff wid the best part av a pig's cheek an' a roast paycock; an' he had a flask av claret stickin' out av the back pocket av his frieze coat!'

"'Thunder an' turf!' schreeches Saint Patherick, 'how did the fellow get the kay av the cellar?'

"'I don't know,' sez Brother Pontifactus; 'but I looked out an' saw him goin' round to the porch at the hall-doore.'

"Quiet and aisy, off goes the Saint; he was walkin' on the grass, so no one could hear his footsteps, an' he stopped short an' listened, for he heard Barney's voice, an' here's what he was sayin':—

"'Don't be afeared, acushla! Shure I'd live on the clippings av tin wid yeh.'

"'But, Barney,' sez some one else, 'I can't help being afeared av Saint Patherick.'

"'Afeared av Saint Patherick!' an' Barney gev a laugh. 'Why, the Saint's the softest-hearted craythur alive!'

"'Yis—I thought he looked soft; he wouldn't have tuk me over in the corracle if he wasn't.'

"'Yeh managed it grand!' sez Barney.

"The Saint wouldn't wait t' hear any more. His few grey hairs round his shaven crown were bristlin' up; he walks round, an' there was Barney wid his arm round the purty girl, an' the



flask of claret in the other. The purty girl jumped up an' giv such a schreech that ye'd hear all over the parish.

"'Barney,' sez the Saint, 'I didn't expect ever to see this day.'

"'Didn't yeh, yer Rivirince?' sez Barney. 'I find it a mighty pleasant one.'

"'An' you,' says the Saint, turnin' to the purty girl, 'what's your name?'

"'Sheelah!' she sez.

"'Well—Sheelah!—why did yeh tell me a lie this mornin'?''

"'Me till yer Rivirince a lie!' she sez; 'I'd scorn it!'

"'Didn't yeh say yeh war comin' over to see a poor dyin' craythur?' he sez.

"'So I was,' she sez, wid a blush all over her face. 'Didn't I want t' come t' see Barney—an' he's always sayin' he's dyin' av love for me!'

"The Saint looked very hard at the pair av them for a minute, an' thin he said:—

"'Barney, I tuk aff yer pinince this mornin', an' as punishment for playing off a thrick on me, I'll put pinince for life on the pair av yez. Come up to the chapel, an' sind for Brother Anthony to give the bride away!'

"So there's me story for yeh," concluded Peter, "an' whin his Rivirince up there in Slane is goin' t' marry a couple, he always sez to me in a jokin' way:—

"'Pether, I'm goin' to put Saint Patherick's pinince upon a couple!'"





## BEGUN IN JEST.

BY MRS. NEWMAN.

AUTHOR OF "HER WILL AND HER WAY," "WITH COSTS,"  
"THE LAST OF THE HADDONS," &c.

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### CHAPTER XXV.

#### HER LEGACY.

THE next morning Aubyn turned over his letters as soon as they arrived in search of the expected one from Gerard. It was there with the rest ; and, on hurriedly opening it, he found a few lines of hearty farewell, and a word or two to the effect that he left Dorothy, Mabel, and their aunt to Aubyn's care, assured that he would do the best for them. "I hope soon to hear the step has been taken, which will strengthen the bond and give Mabel a brother. I have made up my mind to travel for a year or two, at least ; and I hope you will all pardon my having said nothing about my intention. You know me, and you know that, having once made up my mind, no amount of good-natured attempts to make me change it would be of any avail. It is the fear that such attempts would be made, which has caused me to shirk the good-byes, except by letter. I am off to-night to Southampton, where I join the *Elora*, in which I have taken my passage for New York, on my way to California."

Gone already ! Gone for an indefinite time, and without a word as to his reason for going ! What did it mean ? Aubyn sat for a few minutes trying to understand what could have brought about so complete a separation between Mabel and Harcourt as this seemed to imply. What had come between them ? Was it possible that the story about Lucy May had reached her ? No, not that, or not that only—it would not be like Mabel to believe it. But presently he began to argue himself into a more agreeable frame of mind. The situation was not so hopeless, after all. It might only amount to a short sea-passage, a telegram, and a return. Yes ; that would probably be all, when Mabel had time to reflect.



Carelessly turning over his other letters, his eyes lighted upon one, the handwriting of which was familiar to him. Bloggs! He took it up, and opened the envelope.

"HONoured SIR,—

"I write this to thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for all that you've done, and meant to be a doin' for me. You took me by the hand when ne'er another would. You bore with me, and was kind, when you was sufferin' from my cowardly violence; and God knows I meant to give my life to you, to do what you liked with. I think you see how I was a trying, and putting my heart into it, as you said. But it's all over now, sir; don't you never trouble no more about me, for it's all over. Lucy May has been took from her home by a villain—yes, a villain, though he's your friend. I followed 'em up, and went by the same train, jumping in the last minute, and, as soon as we got to London, I took her away from him. If he'd agreed to marry her, as soon as the license could be got, and let her be watched over till then, I would have give her up, to keep her honest and good, and I told him so; but I couldn't get the word from him. He never meant to marry her, sir! I'd only got time just then to knock him down, for I wanted to get her off, quick, to where I'd been thinking of. She's safe and sound now with Mrs. Mason, the mission woman as works for you. There she'll be found, and I'm writing to you to say good-bye for ever. I begun to hope—but that's neither here nor there—I s'pose I'm one of the sort as can't be helped. But God bless you all the same, sir, for trying; and don't think no more of me, for I'm off to Southampton, after Mr. Harcourt. If he's on earth, I'll find him; and then—the Lord have mercy upon him!

"From yours truly,  
"AMOS BLOGGS."

Southampton! Harcourt! What if Bloggs should attack him without finding out his mistake! Aubyn looked at the timetable, then at his watch. Yes, just time!

Seizing his hat, and pausing but a moment in the hall to give the servant a message for the curate, he ran out, and into the road, jumped into the first empty cab he saw, and bade the man drive to Kensington. He would get back to the station in time for the midday train.

"To America, and without saying a word to us!" ejaculated Dorothy, after Aubyn had told her that part of the news. "Oh, Reginald, what has happened? There must be some serious misunderstanding between Mabel and him! She has not been like herself lately; but I thought—I hoped——"



His eyes were gravely downcast.

"She has mentioned nothing of—any cause for anxiety to you, Dorrie?"

"Nothing special. But the whole tone of her letters has made me anxious."

"Better get her to return home," thinking that perhaps Mabel might have heard the rumour about Lucy. It might be that which was troubling her; and if the sisters were together, Mabel would perhaps unburden her mind, not caring himself to repeat the ugly story to Dorothy unless it were absolutely necessary to do so. "Only tell her one thing from me—that I know—say that I know—Harcourt is as deserving our respect as he has ever been."

"Has he been accused of anything then, Reginald?" wonderingly.

"Yes, and unjustly, as I know. Remember I have said that. Why can't you persuade her to come home, and open her heart to you? If a stupid story about Gerard has reached her, you can set her mind at rest by saying that I know it to be absolutely false."

"But—oh, Reginald, if it seems against him, she will tell no one—not even me," anxiously. "And—and I have tried so often, and so unsuccessfully, to induce her to return. Could not you go down, and see what you can do?"

"I have my work cut out for me—more perhaps than I shall be able to compass." He was, in fact, about to follow Bloggs to Southampton by the midday train. Bloggs must have found out that Harcourt was about to join the vessel at Southampton, and gone there after him. If Bloggs had been in time, Aubyn feared that he himself would be too late to prevent the consequences he feared. But it was just possible Harcourt might have got on board before Bloggs arrived, in which case he would be more likely to be safe. "Let Parker," he went on, "take some urgent message from your aunt; she will be ready enough to send one for such a purpose; or, better still, just say that Mabel is wanted at home immediately, without explaining why, and her very anxiety about you will bring her. There has been some great mistake, and a story may have reached her which she should never have heard, and that may be the cause of her trouble. I am following Harcourt to Southampton on the chance of the vessel being delayed. If I get there before he starts, I may be able to induce him to return."



"Only bring him back to us ; make him understand it will be for her happiness."

"I wanted yesterday to give him the hint we agreed should be given about Mabel's mistake in fancying it was of you he was thinking. Had I known he was going so soon, I would have made him listen to me then. He shall hear this time, if I can only get the opportunity. Take care of my Dorrie while I am away." Taking her face between his hands, he kissed the sweet lips, said good-bye to the loving eyes, and in another moment was gone.

"How anxious he seems !" murmured Dorothy, little supposing, in her ignorance of Bloggs' intention, how much there was to fear. But she thought Reginald had only to explain the mistake Mabel had made in supposing Gerard cared for her sister, and that the report against him, whatever it was, was now known to be false, and he would be ready enough to return. Even if Gerard had set out, a telegram to the first place the vessel touched at would bring him back. "We must have Mabel here to meet him when he comes back, and then all will be well !"

She proceeded at once to take her aunt and Parker into her confidence in the matter of making the request for Mabel's immediate return appear, as Reginald had suggested, as urgent as possible.

\* \* \* \* \*

At last the long-looked-for letter Mabel had been hoping for, yet half-fearing to see, was put into her hands. Gerard's writing ! She would know the worst, or best, whichever it was, now ! She went to her own room, and, locking herself in, broke open the envelope, and hurriedly ran through the contents ; then read it more slowly a second and a third time, as though to make quite sure of the meaning, her heart beating heavily the while.

"Good-bye, Mabel. Good-bye to all that is best in the world for me. I saw what your heart was prompting you to say the other night, and I could not let you speak the words lest they should altogether unman me ; indeed, it was unnecessary. I know how troubled you are for me. Nor could I tell you then what it was in my mind to do. I can appreciate your kindness and pity, but I am not to be helped that way. I only want you not to blame yourself in the slightest degree, as I fear a tender conscience may incline you to do. I alone was to blame for



my mad folly in taking your love for granted as I did ; an impertinence I shall not easily forgive myself for. I must have been blinded by conceit or stupidity to approach you in that way. You, of all women in the world ! That look of almost repulsion in your eyes will haunt me for the rest of my life ; it showed me my mistake as nothing else could. I thought I was sufficiently master of myself to remain near you ; but I think so no longer. I can only make sure of myself by putting the sea betwixt us. Only on the other side of the world shall I be sure of not offending in that way again. Meantime, the love which has kept me yours will keep me yours—as I understand this, and you never can—to the end. When, if ever, I am able to regard you, as you perhaps will be, as another man's wife, I will return. Meanwhile, you must not think my life is spoiled ; rather think of me as hard at work, and not, I hope, for myself. Wright will come back in a year or two. He will have it that we are to be together as long as we both live ; but tell Soames my will is the stronger, and I promise he shall return to her sooner than he expects. God bless you, Mabel ! Yours,

“GERARD.”

She caught the letter to her beating heart, holding it pressed there with both hands.

“Yours, oh, Gerard ! To be yours, until death us do re-unite !”

Her mind could for the moment grasp only that one thought. Distance between them seemed as nothing ; he was hers, and she was his. How could she have been so disloyal as to fear ? He must know the truth now. He spoke of being about to leave England, but that must of course be stopped at once. She sent a telegram to Dorothy.

“Tell Gerard I made a great mistake, and ask him to remain ;” making sure by going herself to the office and seeing it despatched.

On her return to the house, she found a new surprise awaiting her. Parker had arrived. Parker, armed with authority, and determined that it should not be her fault if she did not succeed in inducing the truant to return. With a very mysterious face and manner, she informed Mabel that her presence was urgently required in town.

“And Mrs. Harcourt hopes you will at once accompany me home, Miss Leith.”

Mabel's ready acquiescence not a little astonished as well as relieved Parker. She had indeed at once jumped to the conclusion that her “presence,” as Parker called it, was required by



some one besides her aunt. Gerard was there, and he knew! It was Gerard she was going to see.

Leaving Parker to arrange with Soames, Mabel made her way with a light heart down to the drawing-room, where was Mrs. Brandreth, and not alone. She was at the piano, trying a new song, and beside her stood Mr. Leicester.

"Oh!" ejaculated Mabel, who had rushed into the room without much ceremony, her cheeks aglow, and her eyes brilliant with excitement; "I hoped—I thought you were alone."

"Do you wish to speak to me, Miss Leith?" asked Mrs. Brandreth, in a tone of extreme gentleness, intended to be in effective contrast with the other's *brusquerie*, in "dear Edward's" eyes.

"Yes. I find I must go to town at once. I hope it will be no inconvenience to you."

"Inconvenience," repeated Mrs. Brandreth, with a slight shrug of the shoulders. "It has been all holiday of late, you know. But I think I ought to ask where you are going, and to whom?"

"To my aunt, Mrs. Brandreth. She has just sent for me."

"May I enquire who your aunt is, Miss Leith?"

"The Mrs. Harcourt who wrote to you when I came."

"Mrs. Harcourt! I thought she was a lady of some standing."

"Well, I suppose she is"—carelessly.

Part of the truth suddenly dawned upon Mrs. Brandreth. Mrs. Harcourt's nieces were the rich Miss Leiths. But why allow one of them to go out as a governess? Then something else occurred to her.

"And of course your aunt is some relative of Mr. Harcourt's?"

"She is his stepmother."

"I see. Still, I do not understand why your aunt should allow you to go out as a governess, Miss Leith. Some disagreement at home, I suppose?"

"No. The truth is, it was a whim of mine to try the governing, Mrs. Brandreth. I wanted to prove my capability for work to them at home, and my aunt, much against her will, yielded to my persuasions."

"You mean, I suppose, that there was no necessity for you to earn money, and you were simply masquerading here?"



"I do not see that there was any masquerading about it. But I ought, perhaps, to have taken you into my confidence as to its not being necessary to get my living as a governess. All the same, I did really do my best for the children, and considering——"

Was she going to allude to the smallness of her salary? Mrs. Brandreth hurriedly put in—all the more hurriedly for noticing her lover's eyes fixed upon Mabel with an expression in them she had never seen when they fixed upon herself—"I have been deceived from beginning to end, it appears. My brother-in-law has evidently been taken into your confidence all through, though I myself have not been. And I can see now why Mr. Harcourt was invited here."

"As I told you, Mr. Aubyn knew nothing of the family connection when he invited Gerard here. They had been friends at Oxford. We met quite unexpectedly, and then the truth came out. But I asked Reginald to say nothing about it for a while, because I wanted to go on showing that I could do the work I had undertaken to do."

"I can understand Mr. Harcourt being Gerard to you, under the circumstances, Miss Leith, but I cannot understand my brother-in-law being Reginald, if your assertion that no engagement exists between you be true," with a glance toward Mr. Leicester, to which he was fain to reply with a slight lifting of the eyebrows, that he hoped would not be seen by Mabel.

It was not seen. Mabel had no eyes for him as she replied—"He is going to marry my sister."

Astonishment kept Mrs. Brandreth silent for a moment. But she very quickly recognized the rôle it was best to play—that of the deceived, but trusting and forbearing woman, who, instead of retaliating, was inclined to be considerate and friendly towards the girl that had deceived her. She therefore accepted the position with graceful diplomacy. "It might have been better to take me into your confidence, I think, Miss Leith. I could, in that case, have spared you as well as myself some annoyance."

"It was due to you, Mrs. Brandreth, I think."

"I will order the brougham to take you to the station. Shall I send a maid with you to town?"

"No, thank you; my sister's maid is here. I only wanted to tell you I was going, and to say good-bye."



Mrs. Brandreth offered her hand. "I hope we shall meet again under pleasanter circumstances."

"Thank you, and good-bye. Good-bye, Mr. Leicester."

He gave her a stiff little bow for reply. It would be a long time before Edward Leicester entirely forgave her, though he tried to persuade himself that things were far better for him as they were, and very nearly succeeded—when he was not looking at her. Just now, with her new hopes, she looked in radiant contrast with the somewhat faded "lady of his choice." But Mabel was smilingly offering her hand, and, recognizing the exigencies of the situation, he took it in his own, and said a word or two about hoping she would have a pleasant journey up. He was a little astonished, as well as annoyed, at the thrill that ran through him when his hand touched hers for a moment.

Mabel arrived home to hear that Gerard was gone, and that Aubyn had followed him to Southampton in the hope of inducing him to return. But she would not allow to herself that she was disheartened. At worst—if Reginald did not arrive in time—it would only be, as Dorrie said, to telegraph to the first place the vessel touched at.

The hours passed slowly away, spent by Mabel in wandering restlessly from room to room, still insisting to herself there was nothing to fear, and that she did not fear. At any moment Gerard and Reginald might be expected now.

Once Dorothy ventured to say, "Reginald told me that there has been some false report about Gerard. I do not know what it is, but— Dear Mab, have you heard it? Is it that which is troubling you? If so, Reginald bade me tell you that he knows the story to be quite false."

"And so do I," returned Mabel. "What makes you think I am troubled? What is there to trouble me, I should like to know?"—irritable and unnerved with the consciousness of a foreboding which she could not account for.

But as the hours went by without any tidings, they saw that the strain was becoming almost too much for her. The least sound, the mere opening of a door, caused her to tremble and whiten, as though with some terrible dread that ill news was at hand. "Why does not Reginald write or telegraph?" she irritably exclaimed.

They could only murmur something to the effect that news must soon arrive now. They were in fact themselves beginning



to fear that something had happened, though they strove to conceal it from her.

At last news came. A telegram, of a very few words, which the sisters eagerly read together, then let the paper flutter to the carpet at their feet, gazing at each other with terrified eyes and whitening faces.

Mrs. Harcourt picked up the paper, and, trembling with excitement, read—"Been in great anxiety. Fear there is bad news to come. Try to prepare your minds, to that you may be able to spare M. as much as possible."

"Spare M. That seems as though it were intended for me!" ejaculated Mabel in a high, frightened tone. "Only," pressing her hands over the precious letter hidden beneath her dress, "there can be nothing to be spared from, can there, Dorrie? Can there, Aunt Jenny?" looking from one to the other with pleading eyes. "What could there be, you know?"

Another hour of terrible anxiety; her troubled companions striving to nerve themselves and Mabel for what was to come. Then a second telegram. "Sad news. Wright on his way back with me."

"Wright! Where is Gerard, then?—Where is he?" ejaculated Mabel, turning upon the other two with wild eyes.

"I—I am afraid something has happened," faltered Dorothy, in a broken voice, the shocked expression of her face—her whole tone and manner—showing that it was something very serious. In fact, Parker had also received a telegram from Aubyn, and, as he bade her do, had secretly broken the news to her young mistress. "Dear Mab," went on Dorothy, "if there is anything to bear, you will try to bear it well, will you not, for all our sakes?"

"There is nothing to bear," in her dread of something worse forcing her thoughts in another direction, her whole mind now fastening upon the hope that they alluded to the report that had got about. With that letter against her heart, nothing they could say with reference to that cruel story could make the slightest difference to her now. "Yours to the end—Yours!" she whispered to herself.

When they shook their heads, and tried to say something which might prepare her for what they had to communicate, she would listen to not a word. Dorothy's white face, and tearful, pitying looks, and Mrs. Harcourt's more open distress, as they



hovered anxiously about her, were now received with a defiant smile ; or, worse still, a little jest. Moreover, Dorothy's attempt to suggest what had occurred, by drawing down the blinds of the room they were in, only made Mabel excitedly draw them up again, with an almost angry word about her sister's taste for gloom and dulness.

"It is very terrible," murmured Dorothy to her aunt. "We can only wait for Reginald's arrival. He will help us to soften the blow."

That night Aubyn came—he and Wright. They knew then that all hope was gone, and that the terrible truth must now be told.

"He is gone. You did not arrive in time, I suppose ? That is the terrible news they have been trying to tell me ?" said Mabel, with head erect and a little defiant smile, as Aubyn entered the room, came towards her, and took her hand. Then, blanching to the lips at sight of his white set face and grave eyes, but still refusing to see what they might have told her, she added : "Well, he cannot have gone too far for a telegram to reach him, and it will not take so very long to come back, and then those who doubted him will have to——"

"Dear Mabel," murmured Dorothy, "we have not doubted him."

"Then why do you all act like this, putting on that absurd look of distress ? It's—it's quite ridiculous !" looking at them wildly, as though finding it increasingly difficult to battle against her fears.

"If you are thinking of the rumour that got about, that is known now not to have been true, Mabel," gently put in Aubyn. "We know Harcourt was an honourable gentleman."

"Was ?—Was ?"

She was answered only by their silence.

"Do you mean—Oh, not that ! No, no, no, not that !" putting forth her hands, palms outwards, as though to ward off the terrible truth ; then falling prone at their feet, lost to everything.

They lovingly tended her, venturing to give way a little to their own grief now that she lay insensible. Presently her wandering senses came back, and, after a quick look into their faces, as though to discover whether what she had heard were true or only some terrible dream, she turned her face to the wall, lying quite still on the couch where they had placed her.



They watched her for a few moments with anxious eyes, kneeling by her side, until Aubyn broke the silence by offering up, in a low, broken voice, the solemn and touching prayer for the dead.

It was some little relief to see that she understood, though she spoke no word, lying with her hands crossed on her breast, as though over some treasure. They watched by her side, venturing no further word of consolation, until she opened her eyes again, and turned them upon Aubyn, whispering: "Tell me!"

He saw that it was best to tell as much as she could bear, and replied: "There was a collision in the fog, a few hours after the vessel had started from Southampton, and he was amongst the lost. Wright was saved, and when you are able to bear it he will tell you the rest. We have reason to rejoice as well as mourn for our dead."

"Bring Wright here."

"Dear Mabel, when you are a little more——"

"Now!"

"Dear Mabel, when you are more able to listen—to-morrow," whispered Dorothy, tears raining down her white cheeks.

"Now!"

Aubyn went out of the room, and presently returned with Wright, looking very pale and nervous.

Her eyes all too bright, and two fever spots burning in her cheeks, Mabel looked at him. "Tell me—everything!"

Wright looked a little doubtfully and anxiously towards Aubyn, who replied: "Yes, I think it is best—everything."

"We had left Southampton about ten hours, I think, when it happened. A dense fog came on. We were going very slowly, sounding the fog horn, and the captain was taking every possible precaution, when suddenly a large homeward-bound steamer ran into us. Both vessels were almost wrecked, and ours—the *Elora*—was found to be fast settling down. We could obtain no help from the other vessel, for they seemed almost as bad off as we were, and getting out their boats for the crowd of scared people on deck. As quickly as possible the boats of the *Elora* were lowered, but there was great excitement and confusion on board, and one of the largest was lost as soon as launched. Then it was seen that the greater part of those on board might be saved, but not all. Two of the boats were filled, chiefly with women and children, and pulled away to get clear of the vessel before



she went down. I noticed how hard my master worked to get the women and children safely off. We were to go in the last boat. He told me to go first, and just before I went over the side I saw him look hurriedly round, as though to see what the chances were, and then take something from his breast-pocket, and turn away a moment, I think to put his lips to it. It is a little book in some foreign language that he always carried about with him, and was so often reading. He put it into my hands with the words: 'If we should chance to lose sight of each other, give this to Mr. Aubyn for me, he will know whom I wish to have it.'

"Give it to me," whispered Mabel, turning for a moment towards Aubyn.

He put it into her hands. None there doubted any more than did she for whom it was intended.

A much worn pocket Greek Testament. She held it pressed over the letter, and fixed her eyes once more upon Wright's face.

"I thought he was going to follow me, but I know now he never meant to do so. I saw him say a word or two to one of the crew, and it was he that took the vacant place. He told us afterwards that Mr. Harcourt bade him go instead, because he had a wife and children at home, and my dear master's life was of no importance to anybody, he said. No importance—his life! Well, it will all be known now he's gone! There he stood, calm and smiling, and waving his hand as though it was all nothing—that was just like him. By that time the fog had cleared a little, and we saw the big ship plunge like a frightened thing, then lift, and suddenly go down stern foremost. I never saw him again. My dear, dear master! I'd have gone down by his side, I would, and he knew it!"

There was silence again for a few moments, broken only by Wright's sobs. Then came the words spoken with anxious carefulness, as though by the lips of one dying who felt that life was slipping away, and there was no time to spare:

"Please—take care—of—Wright."

And Mabel lay back once more unconscious.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

The shadow of death was upon the house, and all within was silence and desolation. Mrs. Harcourt, Dorothy, and Aubyn were in deep distress, and the servants went about with quiet steps, and pale scared faces, speaking in whispers. Mabel, the beautiful, the beloved, lay at the point of death, struck down in her young strength by brain-fever in its worst form. There seemed not the faintest hope of her recovery.

To lose her now—to have the anguish of seeing her pass away from them unconscious of what, could she have known it, might have brought her back to life!

Gerard Harcourt was saved. The day after Mabel's seizure had come the news that he and another had been picked up almost insensible, when floating upon a spar from the sunken vessel by an outward-bound ship, and landed at Marseilles. He had at once telegraphed to set at rest the minds of those at home, and make inquiries as to the safety of Wright.

A reply had been immediately sent off, giving him all-sufficient reason for returning by the quickest route. Within thirty-six hours he was in the house, in deeper anxiety than the rest, and as unable as they to do anything to help Mabel.

The house resounded with her cries, while they, who would gladly have laid down their lives to save her, could do nothing. She unconsciously bared her soul to them, intensifying their love and misery at the same time.

"Nothing true—nothing left to believe in? Who said it—who dared to say it? And so she killed him with her cruelty. Come back to me, Gerard! just to say you forgive. Love Dorrie's Gerard? Hush, it must never be told! Bury it deep and safe. Where so safe as in a loving heart? And so she killed him with her cruelty. Her love went a-sailing—and—what happened then? You took out your heart and put it safe into the little book, and sent it home to make me good. Down, down to find out the secrets. All wrapt about with seaweed, and rocked to sleep by the waves, with his face upturned to the stars! 'Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell.' They won't let me come to you, Gerard. Gerard? Gone! With Lucy? How could that be? It was Dorrie, you know—darling Dorrie! You don't know him,



Mrs. Brandreth. My Gerard will marry her if he promised. Ah, cruel woman, how dare you smile! Some of the work Dorrie does. I will wear ugly gowns like yours, Dorrie, and you will take me among those dreadful people, and teach me not to mind their horrid dirty ways. Ah, no! you said I was to keep in society, didn't you, Gerard? Yes; I will try to be kind to that silly Mrs. Bruce, and—oh, Gerard! shall I have to be kind to those Alford's, and that dreadful Mrs. Weston, with her old pink cheeks and dyed hair and wicked ways? Yes, wicked, Aunt Jenny! Isn't it wicked of her to say such things about people, you dear darling? Nothing true, who said it? Not Gerard!—no, no! Tell me it was not he—tell me!”

Cut to the heart, but helpless, they listened to her wild talk, incapable of rendering her any assistance, or even of making her understand that they were endeavouring to give it, though she was hour by hour drawing nearer to the terrible crisis when she might pass away from them without a sign—unconscious of the love that was so near to her.

They would have spared Gerard; but all their well-meant efforts to keep him out of hearing were in vain. He stationed himself just outside her room, deaf to their entreaties that he would spare himself. Waving them aside, he stood at his post with downbent head and compressed lips, pierced to the heart by the words which were as sharp arrows to his conscience, showing him, as they did, not only herself, but himself. None, perhaps, saw and understood so much of what Gerard was passing through as did Aubyn, and he saw too clearly to regret it.

When at length the terrible hour came—the crisis, when the doctors had said it would be seen whether they might hope, or must resign themselves to the worst—Gerard passed it alone in his room. It was Aubyn who carried the verdict to him, compressing it into the one word:

“Life!”

The door had been opened a little way, and then hurriedly closed again, not even he being allowed to witness the first effects of the news.

To their loving, impatient hearts it seemed, at first, that life had been only reprieved for a while, so slowly, weakly and reluctantly did she take up the burden of living again. It was so evident that she cared not to make the slightest effort of her own, and they dared not as yet, until the weakened brain had



recovered its elasticity sufficiently to bear the strain of a great joy, venture to make known to her the one thing which would renew her zest for life. It was only for their sakes that she made the least attempt to appear in a degree interested in what was going on about her, and this, she told herself, but to give them time to get reconciled to the idea of the parting. The family doctor, whom they had been obliged to take partly into their confidence, interdicted any allusion to Gerard's rescue until she had advanced another stage in her recovery.

Meantime Mabel took no heed of what was going on, asking no questions, and lying silent and motionless in a half-dreamy state, which the expression of the beautiful grey eyes—seeming to be always looking into distance, as though striving to pierce the veil—showed to be at most but the resignation to live. Hour after hour she remained thus, without speaking, save some word in reply to a loving speech from her tender nurses.

The one only thing that seemed to be of any solace to her was the little worn Greek Testament, which always, awake or asleep, was kept close to her hand. As she lifted it to her lips she would sometimes whisper, with a piteous look at her sister, "See how worn, Dorrie; look at the pencil-marks," then hurriedly hide it away again, a treasure almost too precious to be looked at even by Dorrie's eyes.

Mrs. Harcourt did her best to obey orders, by looking and talking as cheerfully as possible in the presence of Mabel; but she was too apt to suddenly break down and burst into tears and piteous lamentations over her "poor darling" to be of any real service.

It was Dorothy, quiet, self-contained Dorothy, who could speak with seeming calmness when her heart was sinking with fear, that was her sister's best help. But not even to Dorothy did Mabel make any allusion to the past, and they were still too much afraid upon her account to venture to say anything which might give her some hint of the truth.

In vain were all their efforts to interest or amuse her. Books put in her way remained unopened. Her favourite flowers, which Gerard hoped might bear some message or suggest some association with the past, were unnoticed, and works of art, successively brought in, now a picture, now a statuette, a piece of rare old china, which she once would have been so enthusiastic over, were barely glanced at. The more they strove to interest and cheer her, the more they seemed to weary her. Did she, for



their sakes, make some little piteous attempt to appear interested, it always ended in her turning to the wall again, with a weary sigh, and becoming sadder and more silent than before.

At length the doctors began to look grave again. A consultation was held, and it was decided to make a fresh attempt. There must be no longer delay, or she would slip away from them altogether, and this, it seemed, from sheer lack of all desire to live.

Cold December weather; the day which she had once looked forward to for her emancipation from schoolroom work and triumphant return home very close at hand. Now! Was she to be emancipated in another way? She lay back in a low chair, her hands folded loosely in her lap, and her eyes absently following the firelight, flickering fantastically about the beautiful objects in the room, brought there with a hope that they might attract her notice, when the door softly opened, and Lucy May slowly, and not a little nervously, entered the room. She was doing her best to appear at ease, and to bear in mind the careful instructions she had received. But the small tray she carried, upon which was some light dainty to tempt the invalid's appetite, shook a little, and the jingle of the glass upon it, to say nothing of her silence—so few entered there without some loving word—attracted Mabel's attention.

"Lucy!" she murmured, with a little half smile. In another moment memory was at work. A faint tinge of colour came into her cheeks, and a look of enquiry into her eyes. Why was Lucy there?

"I am so glad that you are getting a little better now, Miss Leith."

"Thank you."

"Shall I light the lamp?" It had been left unlighted in order to give Lucy an excuse for remaining in the room, by appearing to be engaged for a while.

"Thank you."

"The days are so short now, are they not, miss? We shall soon have Christmas here," recommenced Lucy, as with trembling hands she lighted the lamp, then arranged and rearranged the glass of jelly and plate upon the tray. Mabel made no reply, and Lucy, in her agitation—she was apt to lose nerve when it was most required—was trying in vain to recollect the little speech she had been so carefully tutored to make, and remembering only the solemn warnings that had been given her



as to the serious consequences which might come of a mistake, was on the point of bursting into tears. But, after a nervous glance towards the partly opened door, she hesitatingly began again:

"I dare say you are surprised to see me here, Miss Leith. But Mrs. Harcourt is so sorry for me; and I did not like to go home just yet, because—that is, I mean— Of course there is nothing for her to be sorry about, for it's known now that it was all a dreadful mistake about— Mr. Har——"

"Hush!"

"But I mustn't. I—I mean I'm afraid you supposed—I do not think you know how it occurred, Miss Leith, and—I should so much like to tell you, if you could only listen without its making you ill."

Mabel remained white and silent, and Lucy went on.

"I told—people, something that was not true, Miss Leith. I thought it was true, but it wasn't, and I am so very, very sorry, because I'm afraid it made you think ill of Mr. Harcourt."

"Nothing could do that," said Mabel, with a little sob in her voice, wearily adding, "You need not go on. I do not want to hear any more. I am tired—another time."

Lucy looked nervously towards the open door behind Mabel again, and, taking her cue, hurriedly recommenced:

"Oh, Miss Leith, dear, do let me tell you—pray do! It was not Mr. Harcourt who used to meet me in the woods and make love to me. I thought it was; but directly I saw Mr. Harcourt I knew that he wasn't him—I mean," anxiously, "that he wasn't the other. And now everybody knows that it was Mr. Noel, who was so wicked as to take the other gentleman's name, on purpose to deceive people by throwing the blame on him. It was Mr. Noel all the time; and he's been finely punished for it, too, according to what's said. He will be obliged to keep his bed for weeks, and he'll never be handsome again, after the beating Amos Bloggs gave him. And he gave him the opportunity to strike back, too, for Amos isn't a coward. He told Mr. Noel where he was to be found if he wanted to have him taken up and sent to prison for it. But Mr. Noel hasn't done nothing to him, and doesn't mean to, they say, on account of not wanting what he did to be made known. But I think Amos needn't have been quite so unkind about it, taking the chain and locket from me, and throwing them in Mr. Noel's face, and vowing he would never have anything more to say



to me, and all that, as if I could help Mr. Noel being so wicked."

Lucy was meandering on, when a slight sound caught her attention, and, glancing towards the door, she was reminded again, and began afresh.

"There really seems to have been nothing but mistakes about Mr. Harcourt. When Mr. Wright came back with the story about the vessel going down, and—people being lost, I am sure everybody thought——"

"Thought?" repeated Mabel, her attention half caught, then abstracted again, until it was once more aroused by Lucy's words.

"Yes; about so many being lost, and all that," hesitatingly replied Lucy. "It was thought it must be true; but it wasn't, and——"

"What was not true—what?"

"Why, about so many being lost, when they wasn't."

"What?" Mabel sprang to her feet, with white face and wild eyes.

Lucy looked apprehensively at her for a moment, then burst into tears, and moved towards the door. As she drew near, two strong hands took her by the shoulders, and she found herself summarily hustled out of the way, and delivered over to a servant to be "got rid of." A rather ungracious proceeding, Lucy thought, considering that she had done her best to help.

Dorothy had slipped quietly into the room, and had her arms about Mabel, gently impelling her back into the chair, kneeling by her side, and looking up into her eyes with a loving smile.

"You will try to bear the good news bravely, will you not, Mab, dear?"

"Good?"

"Yes, darling, good; and I see you are beginning to understand what it is. Now, Mab, I will not have you look at me in that way. How can I tell you if you do not try to listen more calmly? It is such a good opportunity for proving your self-control and all that, you know. I want you to be a heroine of the kind we two have always admired, brave and strong——"

"Gerard?"

"Yes, dear; quite safe, and at home, and——"

"Gerard!"



"Pray do not waste your energies in apostrophising him, dearie. There really is no time to waste in that way. You see you have a duty to perform, and that is to get well as quickly as possible, for all our sakes. Between ourselves, Gerard is so very unmanageable, as things are. He will scarcely go away from the door of your room night or day, and keeps the poor auntie almost at her wits' end, and in a continued state of anxiety lest he, too, should be ill. He is now so very impatient, too, in addition to his other defects. Indeed there will be no peace for any of us until you are well. Though I hope"—raising her voice a little for the benefit of some one near—"he will try to remember that you cannot be expected to get used to things all at once. It would be quite enough if he said just one little word to show you he is not far off."

"Mabel!"

His voice! Mabel sprang to her feet again, her cry of joy ringing through the room.

"Gerard!"

The door slowly opened, and, looking eagerly towards it, her eyes fell upon—the portly form and smiling rubicund face of Dr. Davenport. With a quivering sigh of disappointment she sank back into her seat again.

He advanced towards her, talking in his cheerful, professional way about the temperature of the room; then, touching her pulse, smilingly informed her that it was now quite time she began to do her nurses and him some credit. "You ought to be requiring fresh air, and beef and mutton now, Miss Leith. But you must use your will, you know—I am sure you have a pretty strong one—and try to assist us by taking more nourishment. The most ethereally minded young ladies find it necessary to take food occasionally in this matter-of-fact world, and," in reply to the question he thought he saw on her lips, "we want you to be strong enough to rejoice with your friends over the rescue of Mr. Harcourt. There, I have finished my lecture, and I must ask you to reward me for making it so brief by allowing me to stay here a short time, to look over my notes."

Dismissing Dorothy with a look, he drew a chair towards the table on which stood the shaded lamp, sat down, crossed one knee comfortably over the other, and became absorbed in the contemplation of the hieroglyphics in his note-book.

Mabel was very restless and excited for a while, but of course she could not ask the questions she was longing to ask



of this "tiresome old man," as she mentally designated him. And there he continued to sit, as though he were ever so welcome, complacently pondering over his memorandums, and making slight alterations here and there.

"Stupid old man, with his fat white hands, and heavy gold pencil-case!" thought Mabel, not just then able to feel as grateful as she ought to feel for past help. "How different these from those other hands that had once held hers in their firm grip—strong, capable, and not too white nor small hands!" She was irritably conscious, too, that had she put her thoughts into words the good doctor would only have smiled benignly upon her, as a young lady who had not yet acquired the right to be taken seriously.

She impatiently twisted and turned about in her chair for a while, then gradually became more composed, lying back silent and motionless, getting accustomed to the great happiness that had come to her; and this, without the over-excitement which had been so much dreaded. When Dr. Davenport presently brought her a composing draught, she informed him, in Mabel fashion, that she had been thinking all sorts of unkind things about him. She was amusedly forgiven, her hand gently patted, in a kind paternal way, by the "fat white" one she had been mentally reviling, and she soon sank into a deep dreamless sleep.

From the time of her awakening all danger was over, and Mabel's health—mental and physical—began rapidly to improve. Her best aids to convalescence were the little notes from Gerard, that Dorothy was continually putting into her hands. She smiled and blushed over them in a way that brought tears of joy to Dorothy's cheeks. Dorothy was now able to indulge in a little talk over her own happiness, with the knowledge that this, too, did Mabel good. But there was no sentimentalizing; their merry conceits—so little did for a jest, now—and graceful fancies keeping the atmosphere clear and healthy.

Mabel was, moreover, beginning to be able to receive visitors, and to her great joy amongst the first came Miss Temple, or Mrs. Worcester as she must now be called. She had heard from Mrs. Leicester that the governess at Beechwoods had left and was ill, and although she did not know how serious Mabel's illness was, Mrs. Worcester had immediately taken steps to find her. She wrote to Mrs. Brandreth, begging her to forward a letter which she enclosed to Miss Leith's address, and the letter



had come into Dorothy's hands, to whom it afforded ample evidence of the value of Mrs. Worcester's friendship. She begged her dear Miss Leith to come to her in her new home, and be nursed, and petted, and doctored into health and strength again. Allan was looking forward to making her acquaintance, and heartily joined in begging her to lose no time—not to hesitate, but to come to them at once. She would be so welcome, and it would give Allan so fine an opportunity for proving how clever he was, by restoring her to health. It would be quite an advertisement for him, and so forth—a kindly, cheery letter, evidently written in all sincerity.

Mrs. Worcester received a reply, which brought her at once to the house, and she then for the first time discovered that she had, in fact, been making friends with influential people. But her own motives had been made sufficiently manifest to prevent her feeling any scruple in accepting the kindnesses pressed upon her. It was, besides, so evident that Mabel was the happier for her presence there.

Then came the children, Sissy, Mima, and Algy, walking very softly on tiptoe, and at first very silent and awed by the sight of their dear Miss Leith looking so white and ill. But some merry jest of hers soon gave them courage, and they were talking away as unrestrainedly as of old, telling her all the latest news from Beechwoods—news which they themselves considered to be most wonderful.

"Uncle Reggie is going to be married; but that does not matter so much now, for we are going to leave Beechwoods, and live at the Hall. And, would you believe it, Miss Leith, dear? Grace, and Roland, and Willy, and we are all going to be brothers and sisters, now. You must try to guess how that could be," said Algy, with the air of stating a difficult problem, looking gravely up into her face, as he sat on a stool before her, with one foot over his knee.

Having looked duly mystified, she was informed, "It is because mamma is going to be married to Mr. Leicester. That will make us all brothers and sisters, you know. Soames is to go with us for a little while; but she is to be married, too, soon, and her name's going to be Mrs. Wright. You've got to be called the other one's name when you're married, you know. Everybody seems to be going to be married now, but you must wait for me, Miss Leith, I told you. Mr. Harcourt is going to take care of you till I am ready, and he's going to be very kind to you, and give



you lots of holidays, and 'muse you with stories, and games and things."

Even Mrs. Brandreth made her appearance at Mabel's receptions, as they were called, with gracious smiles and good wishes, ready to condone all that had once seemed little offences against herself, and reckon the Miss Leiths amongst her dearest friends for the future. To a select few, she was afterwards apt to deplore the fact that her husband could never be brought to admire the younger sister. But then dear Edward was so very *exigeant* in his tastes—so few women came up to his standard—and Mrs. Leicester could not but agree with him as to the necessity for women of good breeding keeping in their proper sphere. "Really, you know, her best friends must acknowledge that dearest Mabel had been, to say the least, a little eccentric in her ways."

At length Dr. Davenport gave his permission for Mabel to spend a few hours in the morning room, and then came the long-looked-for meeting between Gerard and her. He was there when she entered, lightly leaning upon Dorothy's arm, and followed with fussy anxiety by her aunt, laden with wraps and restoratives.

"Enough to make one fancy oneself a confined invalid, is it not?" said Mabel, endeavouring to speak lightly, as with tear-dimmed eyes and quivering lips, she put out her hands to him.

"At last!"

Utterly regardless of spectators, Dorothy, Mrs. Harcourt, and a servant in the background, he took her in his arms, and, her confused little attempt at a jest about her aunt and the Lord Chamberlain notwithstanding, sealed the compact on her lips.

But Dorothy had quietly drawn her aunt out of the room again, closing the door upon the lovers, and then came Gerard's second time of asking, as he termed it.

"But you have taken me this time without asking," she murmured, in delightful confusion.

"Mine!"

She was silent a moment, her fingers tremblingly tracing the seam across his sleeve; then whispered, raising her eyes with grave, tender trust to meet his, "'And nought is ours, but what we have foregone.'"

He saw what was in her mind, and his thoughts reverting to that terrible time when he had battled so fiercely against himself, he gravely repeated, "Mine!" After another look at the



beautiful face, in which the colour came and went too quickly, he more lightly went on : " But how about Dorothy and Aubyn ? I don't exactly see where the foregoing came in there."

" Perhaps it was not necessary—for them. Dorothy is so different."

" I see ; and Aubyn is so different from me. And the inference is, that the good people get what they want, without having first to forego it."

" The idea ! as though good people did not forego the most ; and——" she stopped, breaking into a little laugh, as she saw the trap that had been laid for her.

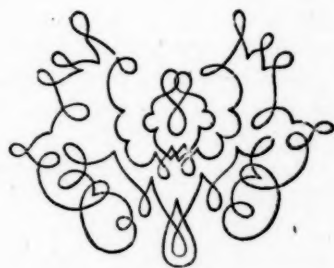
" Then it follows that we are the good people, and Aubyn and Dorothy are nowhere."

" Ah, Gerard, you are just the same as ever !"

" Not improved ?"

" No !" lowering her head, until her lips touched his hand. " Only revealed."

THE END.





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